

# Scuggog's Garden Estates

*featuring*

**Seven Mile Island & Kent Estates**



**BY J. PETER HVIDSTEN**



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& Kent Estates



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Researched and Published by J. Peter Hvidsten

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# Introduction

During the early part of the 20th century, two Scugog Township properties bordering on the shores of Lake Scugog were developed into magnificent estates, complete with walkways meandering through colourful floral gardens, adorned with arbors, benches, statues and reflecting pools.

The largest, and most magnificent of these estates was located just off the west shore of Scugog Island on an isolated 26 acre parcel of land originally known *Nonquon Island*. This property later became known as *Seven Mile Island* and became the summer estate home of Alex Ross and Mary Wilson during the 1920s and 1930s.

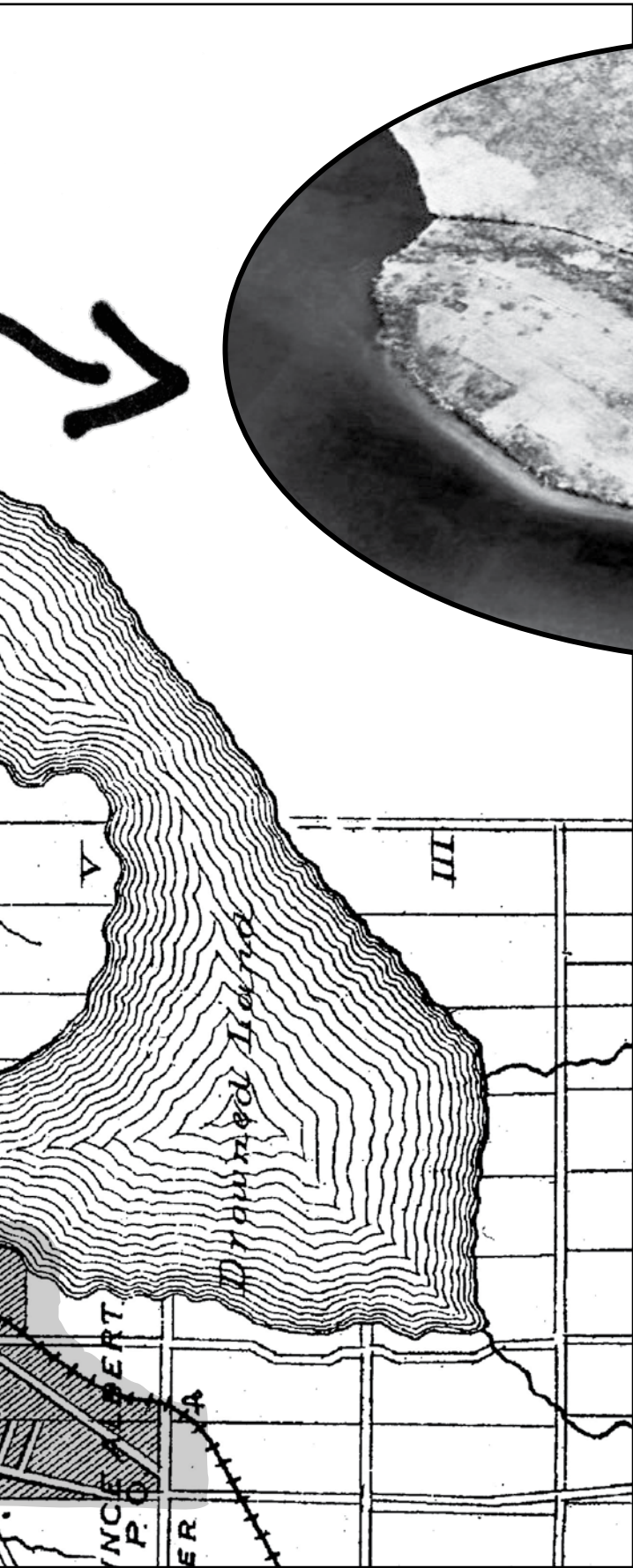
Another equally impressive estate was located just north of downtown Port Perry on a rise overlooking Lake Scugog. This property became known as *Beechenhurst* when owned by Dr. John H. Sangster in the late 1800s.

The beautiful property was purchased in 1919 by Frederick and Ethel Kent, who renamed the garden paradise *Beechcroft*. In later years it was most often referred to as *Kent Estates*. The Kent family owned the property from about 1920 to 1940.

The history of these two estates was first published in *Historic Homes & Estates*, by Paul Arculus and J. Peter Hvidsten in 2002. Since then additional information has surfaced, and this document provides the most up-to-date information available about these two incredible Scugog estate properties.







# Seven Mile Island Estate

*This map of Scugog Island shows "Nonquon Island" (B) which later became known as "Seven Mile Island." The town of Port Perry is the area shaded (A) at the south end of Scugog Lake, a distance of about seven miles from the Island.*

*Map from the Historical Atlas of Ontario County, 1877.*

# Nonquon Island

## *Early pioneer owners of the island*

LONG BEFORE the first white settlers arrived in the Scugog basin, Seven Mile Island was known as Nonquon Island. A stretch of swamp separated the 50 acre parcel from the mainland, making access to this isolated piece of land on the west shore of Scugog Island difficult.

In his book, *Scugog and Its Environs*, Rev. F.G. Weir wrote, "The Indians used to frequent this spot in the days when they had undisputed possession of the whole country round about, as is shown by the things that have been unearthed - arrowheads, playthings and even skeletons."

Little is known of that time, but the information available suggests that the first white man to own the property was John Griffon, who took possession of it in 1818. He reportedly sold it to John Williams for \$21.

Registry office records dating back to the early 1880s show Albert C. Stevens as owner of the land, which was known as Nonquon Island. Mr. Stevens operated the property as a sportsman's home, providing comfortable accommodation for hunters and fishermen, many whom travelled from parts of Canada and the U.S.A., to enjoy the tremendous fishing and shooting available on and around Lake Scugog. While Mr. Stevens and his wife provided adequate facilities for their guests, the property paled in comparison to what it would become through much of the next century.

From the mid 1890s until 1919 the property changed hands a number of times. Some of the owners during this period include: Harry Beasley (1902-09), Silas E. VanCamp (1910), George Cotton (1911) and Thomas Sintzel (1912-19).



*In the beginning, Seven Mile Island was known as "Nonquon Island." During the 1880s, this log cabin was used as accommodation for hunters and fishermen coming to Lake Scugog.*

### ***The Thomas Sintzel years***

It was during the time Thomas Sintzel owned the property that it became known as Seven Mile Island. Sintzel lived in the original log cabin on the property for a short time before beginning construction of a large new house which he named Delmont Cottage.

A news item in an October 1912 issue of the *Port Perry Star* reported that Seven Mile Island Hotel was a popular spot for hunters, indicating that Mr. Sintzel rented out rooms to duck hunters during the fall. Another report in 1916 suggests that the Island was a popular spot for excursions, where participants could enjoy swimming, boating and picnics in front of the hotel.

While Seven Mile Island was under the ownership of Mr. Sintzel, he also developed a registered plan of subdivision for 19 lots along the north-west shore of Lake Scugog.



## Delmont Cottage

Thomas Sintzel erected the Delmont Cottage in 1913 for a summer resort and to improved his Nonquon Island property to such and extent as to greatly increase its value, beside putting the land into the best condition possible.

Mr. Sintzel published a brochure for his new Delmont Cottage about a year later to promote the property. The brochure provided the following information:

"Delmont Cottage is a summer home situated on a pretty Island in one of the most beautiful little lakes in Canada. The cottage is furnished with a spacious veranda which commands a delightful view of Lake Scugog for six miles, and in the evening the lights of Port Perry can be seen glimmering in the distance.

Seven Mile Island on which Delmont Cottage is situated is about 50 miles from Toronto, has an altitude of 500 feet above Lake Ontario and contains about 40 acres, with beautiful shade trees. It is a delightful spot for both young and old.

Some seek rest and quite, while others amuse themselves on the lawn playing tennis, quoits and ball games, while boating, fishing and bathing is an enjoyable pastime and sport for all.

The accommodations of Delmont Cottage are of the best. There is a large sitting room with fireplace and piano, also a stand where stamps, postcards, chocolates and the best brands of cigars, tobaccos and cigarettes may be obtained.

Long distance telephone connections and mail is delivered to the Cottage daily.

The table is most carefully provided for. Butter, eggs, vegetables and fruits are produced in abundance on the Island and there is ample supply of rich milk and cream. The drinking water for Delmont Cottage is drawn from a "well spring" which is unexcelled for its purity.

Boats by day or week can be provided for guests, also gasoline launch for excursion parties. Guests are coveted to and from Island if advised of time of arrival.

Private reserve for duck hunters, garage for automobiles on the Island.

Address all business letters to Thomas Sintzel & Son, Del-Cottage, Port Perry, Ontario."



*Delmont Cottage 1914*



*Thomas Sintzel*



*Children sitting on the lawn in front of Delmont Cottage about 1916.*

Alex Ross Wilson purchased the Seven Mile Island estate property, including Delmont Cottage, from Thomas Sintzel in May 1919



*A group of people on porch of the Delmont Cottage during its construction in 1914.*



*Alex Ross Wilson, left, with Thomas Sintzel. Mr. Wilson and his wife Mary, purchased Seven Mile Island from Sintzel in 1919.*

*Thomas Sintzel is seen here on his property at Seven Mile Island about 1914. The original old log cabin, can be seen behind him, and his new Delmont Cottage is to the left.*







Seven Mile Island is located at the west end of the 11th Concession (now called Seven Mile Island Road), on Scugog Island. The 50 acre property is located on rise in the land that is only accessible along a narrow dirt causeway through the swamp.

## Seven Mile Island

### *The Alexander Ross and Mary Wilson years*

On May 2, 1919, Alex Ross Wilson and his wife Mary purchased Seven Mile Island from Thomas Sintzel and began to develop the property into what would become a magnificent estate. Mr. Wilson amassed his wealth as owner of his brother's company, Andrew Wilson & Co., which manufactured the very popular "Bachelor" brand cigars. In 1923 the business was taken over by the Imperial Tobacco Co. Ltd., although Mr. Wilson continued as its president until 1929.

After leaving the tobacco company, Mr. Wilson became vice-president of Consolidated Press Limited of Toronto, publishers of Saturday Night, The Canadian Home Journal and the Farmer's Magazine.

A. R. Wilson was a manufacturer of the popular "Bachelor" brand of cigars.



### *Recollections of a granddaughter*

In a 2006 interview with Eleanor Jarvis, a granddaughter of Alexander Ross Wilson, she recalls the family and Island vividly. "I loved the place dearly and have wonderful memories of it. It was a place of pure enchantment for a child growing up," she said.

She recalls brothers Andrew and Alexander worked together starting in their teen years. They boys were on their own, their father having died years earlier.

"Andrew founded the business, he being older, while Alex as he was always known, was still a minor. The business passed to my Alex after Andrew's tragically early death," she wrote.

When Alex retired and left the business, he bought out the entire warehouse stock of cigars for his own personal use saying, "there will never be a good cigar made again".

After Andrews death, Alex continued to live in the house at 5 Beaumont Rd. in Toronto that he had shared with his brother's family.



Alexander  
Ross Wilson



Over the next few years they assembled a number of small parcels of land abutting the area, until they had accumulated approximately 91 acres. It was during the Wilson's ownership of the Seven Mile Island that this relatively undeveloped land, was turned into an estate showplace.

The Wilsons immediately started work on enlarging Delmont Cottage, adding a number of buildings to the property, constructing numerous floral gardens, a swimming pool, tea house, reflecting pool and an elaborate boathouse with a dance hall on the upper level. The property boasted beautifully manicured lawns, rose gardens, bridges, ponds and an elaborate pergola leading to the magnificent 26 room mansion.

Mr. Wilson hired talented Scottish stonemasons to erect huge stone pillars, the shape of cigars, at the entrance to the property and also construct stone fences and walkways throughout the property. The craftsmen came to the estate to do this work after completing the construction of Casa Loma in Toronto.

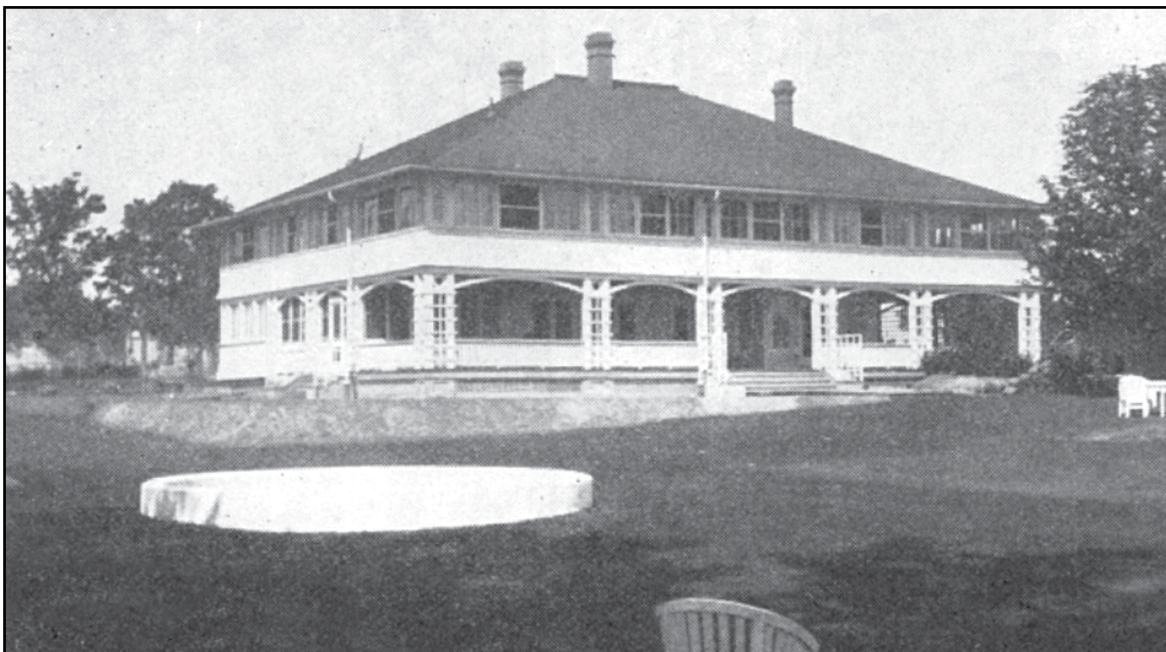
While residents of Seven Mile Island, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson became quite involved within the community. They were known for their generosity, purchasing new uniforms for the Port Perry Band on one occasion, and donating \$ 1,000 towards cleaning up Lake Scugog on another.

Occasionally, the Wilsons would open their property to the community for garden parties. On one of these occasions in August 1927 Port Perry Star publisher Samuel Farmer described the event as follows:

"A Gala day on Scugog as Mr. and Mrs. A.R. Wilson opened the grounds of Seven Mile Island for a garden party which the whole community attended. "

"We can't think of it, without a feeling of shame, for the way in which the crowd acted was more like hungry refugees than guests."

Mr. Wilson was 71 years old when he died at his home at 5 Beaumont Rd., in the Rosedale district of Toronto, on October 12, 1941, after an illness of about two months. He was survived by his wife Mary, a step-daughter Mrs. Roy McConnell, and a nephew, R.A. Wilson.



The Wilson's main residential building was impressively set on a large manicured lawn. The 5,200 sq. ft. two storey house, enlarged from Delmont Cottage (page 4) had four fireplaces, eight bedrooms, a den, large kitchen and livingroom.



# Letters from Eleanor

*Seven Mile Island as remembered by Eleanor Jarvis,  
a granddaughter of Alex and Mary Wilson*

**Publisher's Note:**

In June 2006 I received an unexpected email from Eleanor Jarvis, a granddaughter of Alex and Mary Wilson. In her email she provided an incredible detailed insight into the life and amenities of Seven Mile Island during the 1920s.

Eleanor, 92, of Poulsbo, Washington, wrote to

me over a period of a few weeks, with her vivid memories of what it was like to spend summers on the Island, and also explaining the gardens and facilities available to the family and friends.

Her letters, addressed to me, have been published over the following few pages.

J. Peter Hvidsten



*Wilson House  
1984*

June 2006

Hello Mr. Hvidsten.

I have put together as complete and comprehensive a description of the buildings and features of the property as I can.

When the summer house at Seven Mile Island underwent its metamorphoses from Delmont Cottage to Almarie Gardens around 1918-1920 I was unaware, as I wasn't born until a year later, by then the transformation was almost complete.

A few minor tweaks after that gave major results and the house settled in to twenty years of providing comfort and much joy. Comfort and relaxation and casual living were the theme of the design and the decor.

The first floor was simple, just three main rooms and an entrance hall. Starting at the northeast corner and working around clockwise we start at the kitchen which was augmented by a paved and fenced courtyard which also enclosed, on the north side of the house, a wing containing a small self-contained apartment for the use of the help.

At the south end of the kitchen there was a

small service pantry, passing through that one entered the dining room which occupied the southeast corner of the building. The room contained a fieldstone fireplace and a french door which opened onto the drive on the east side, a portico was added here so people arriving and departing by car could reach the house without having to walk through the rain.

This divided the space, making it the new passageway to the hall so the dining room was extended to include a large rectangular bay of glass on the south side that accommodated the glass dining table and provided an unobstructed view of the garden and the lake.

A door on the west wall opened to the entrance hall, the front door being on the left and the stairs on the right. Across the hall another door opened to the living room on the southwest corner. This also contained a fieldstone fireplace and two french doors opening to the veranda on the south and west. At the north end of the living room one entered the billiard room which held a third fireplace.



*The beautiful white lattice arbour, surrounded by hundreds of brilliant flowers and shrubs, led to a large water fountain which was located in front of the 28 room main residence of the Wilsons.*



*Looking north along the shoreline of Lake Scugog. The picture shows the expansive manicured lawns, and the ornate fence which surrounds the swimming pool in the background.*



A wide veranda wrapped around the south and west sides of the house, from the front door on the south side to the billiard room on the west, each room having its own walled off section of it.

The second floor was larger, this achieved by adding the veranda on the first floor and building out over it. On the south and west side, those having the best views, there were five large bedrooms, each having its own dressing-room or vestibule, two large rooms on the north side which were reserved for the help, an exercise room, and a sitting room which opened to an upper level deck above the portico.

There was also another bedroom off that which occupied the northeast corner but was seldom used due to its unfavorable location above the kitchen courtyard.

The whole of the upstairs was surrounded by almost floor to ceiling and wall to wall windows which opened out fully, making the whole upstairs as close to being outdoors as could be imagined.

That's installment one, probably in more detail than you ever wanted but you can glean whatever may be useful.

Installment two will follow.  
Eleanor.



*Taken in 1930 from the top of the estate's water tower, the picture shows the west and south sides of the Wilson's estate, with there beautifully manicured lawns. The decorative fence along the bottom picture surrounds the entire swimming pool area.*



*A large stone fountain featuring dozens of small sculptures.*



Looking across the 50'x24' in-ground swimming pool towards the Wilson's main residence, surrounded by gardens.

### Letters from Eleanor . . .

## The great "Lake Scugog Women's Swimming Race" from the Port Perry lakefront dock to Seven Mile Island

Back in the mid-twenties, when Gertrude Ederlie and later Florence Chadwick swam the English channel long distance swimming became the rage and women swimmers were the celebrity athletes of the day.

My grandmother who was an avid swimmer thought it would be great fun to sponsor a women's swimming race from the Port Perry dock to the boathouse at Seven Mile Island. Flyers were put out and a silver cup was offered as first prize. Several women entered but began to drop out, one by one.

The day came and a crowd assembled at the dock. The Mayor was there holding the cup and only two contenders showed up: my grandmother and her close friend. The two women plunged in and forged ahead, followed by two boats and a support crew. A third boat brought up the rear carrying the mayor holding the cup.

Her friend began to fall behind but my grandmother churned on, finally reaching the boathouse dock and was ceremoniously presented with the cup.

Someone graciously had it engraved and placed it on the mantle in the living room, I remember seeing it there for awhile before it discretely disappeared and the Great Lake Scugog Women's Swim Race was conveniently forgotten.

That's all for now  
Eleanor.

### Moving on...

Peter, I don't know if you received my email about the Port Perry to Seven Mile Island swimming race. It may not have been sent. If it was, perhaps I should apologize for being so facetious, but at the time no one laughed more than the participants themselves.

It was just a hint of my grandmother's passion for water sports, swimming, diving, and sailing on Lake Ontario.

It was that passion that caused the swimming pool to go in as soon the house.

### Another swimming race

In August 1927, the Wilson's opened up their estate property for a garden party, to which the entire community was invited.

One of the highlights of the days was a swim from Port Perry to Seven Mile Island. Robert Harris and Arthur Carnegie entered the race, but Arthur was take out after a few miles.

Robert finished the race in four hours and thirty-four minutes. Both contestants received a gold watch from Mrs. Wilson.



## *The Swimming Pool*

When the pool was first built, it was roofed over and heated to extend the swimming season. It wasn't very satisfactory in the summer so the roof was removed after two or three years.

Down the bank and under the changing rooms there used to be a big coal furnace that heated the water as it was pumped up from the lake.

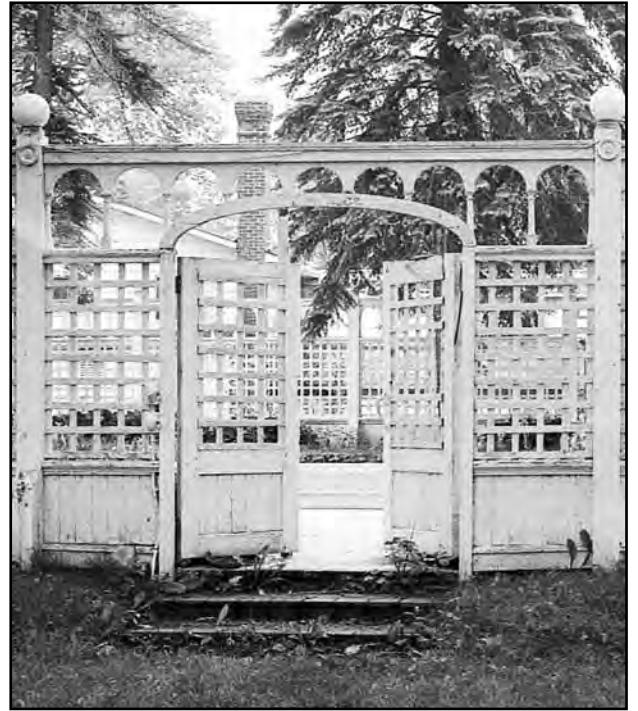
Every winter the pool had to be drained and the straight sides braced with huge timbers wedged between them. They were whole tree-trunks, bark on, and then the whole pool was filled with straw to keep it from freezing and cracking.

After the pool was filled with straw they then built a whole pitched roof over it (at ground level) to keep it dry. No plywood then, no power tools, just boards and hand-hammered nails, and this process had to be repeated every year. I never knew how they got all this into the pool enclosure or, even more curious, how they got it out.

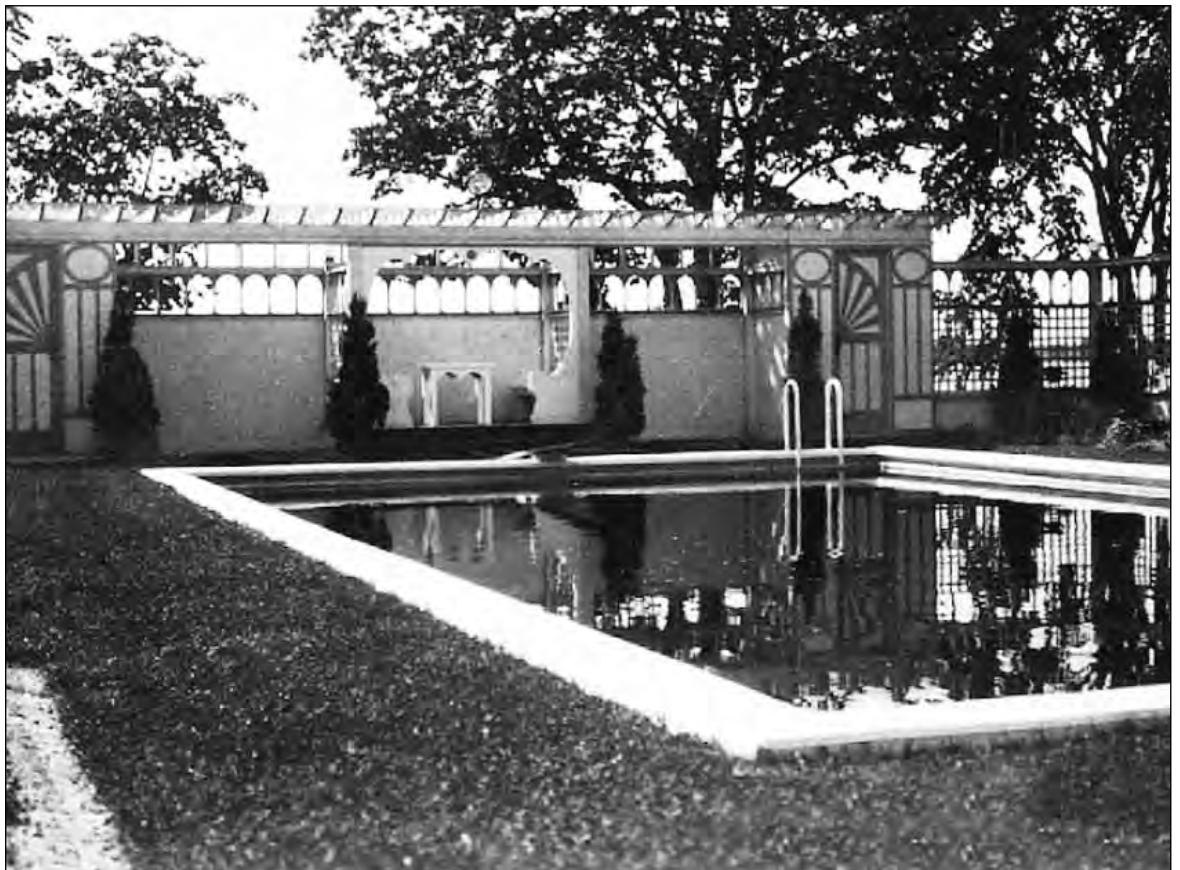
The same procedure, minus the timbers was performed on the fountains and then they were completely boxed over.

More later.

Eleanor.



*The entrance and a small section of the ornate wood fence, which surrounds the 50'x24' in-ground swimming pool.*



*The beautiful in-ground swimming pool, surrounded by an ornate fence had two change rooms at the far end.*

Letters from Eleanor . . .

Hi Peter:

I must mention this before I forget it:

The story about the Elys establishing a refugee camp on the island are not unfounded. Mrs. Ely discussed it with my grandmother.

The plan, as she explained it, was to create a place of quiet and seclusion and rest and relaxation for older refugees who had been severely traumatised and needed to be nursed back to health.

Mrs. Ely said that many of the refugees were orthodox and would be offended by the statuary on the island and asked that it be removed before the close of sale.

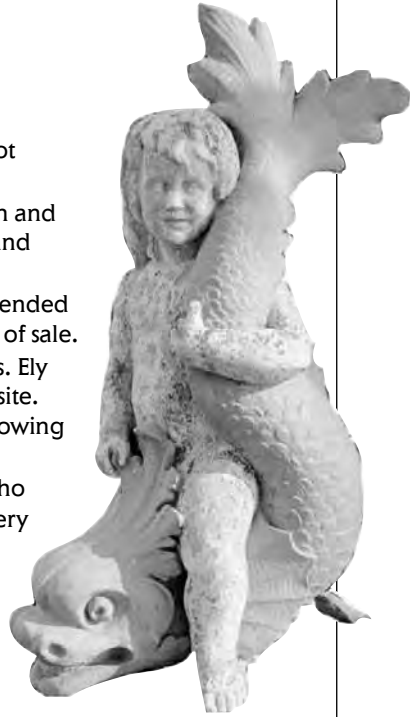
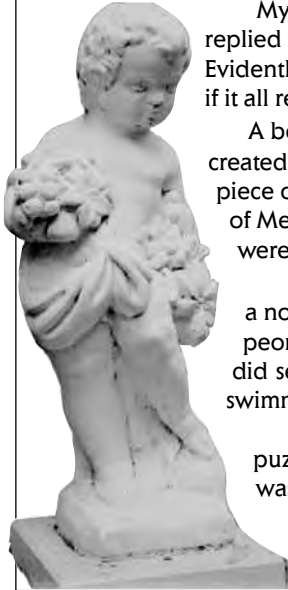
My grandmother said that would be unfeasible and Mrs. Ely replied that she supposed they would just have to bury it on site. Evidently that didn't happen, all though I have no way of knowing if it all remained.

A better plan would have been to contact the sculptor who created them, she might have wanted to take some back. Every piece of sculpture in the gardens, with the single exception of Mercury, was commissioned for it's specific site and were all done by the same artist.

The satyr and nymph had originally maintained a nodding acquaintance from opposite sides of the peony garden facing the portico but the peripatetic pair did seem to get around a bit, at one time they flanked the gate to the swimming pool.

I hope I have cleared up that confusion and set one piece of the puzzle in place. I don't know why the plan was never carried out, but it was considered.

Eleanor.



Hello again Peter:

I was just reading about the Mississaugas on the Heritage Scugog website when your email came in. How delightful to read that they were tall.

My grandmother became good friends with Mrs. Goose, a prominent elder and the two women visited each other frequently. Among the pictures that my family is now searching for was a picture of my grandmother standing under the outstretched arm of Mr. Goose. He must have been at least seven feet tall and well proportioned. I used to wonder how he came to be so tall, now I know he had a right to be, by inheritance.

I never knew what his position in the tribe was, I wondered if he was chief. I only knew that Mrs. Goose was a high-ranking elder and seemed to hold a grandmotherly presence over all.

No, sorry I don't know anything about the mercury statue. It was a late addition to the garden I remember when it was delivered in a box and my grandmother calling a hasty conference with my mother over it's complete state of nudity. It was left in it's box until a fig-leaf could be delivered.

I wasn't very big then, perhaps five or six, but listen as hard as I could I never did figure out what was going on.

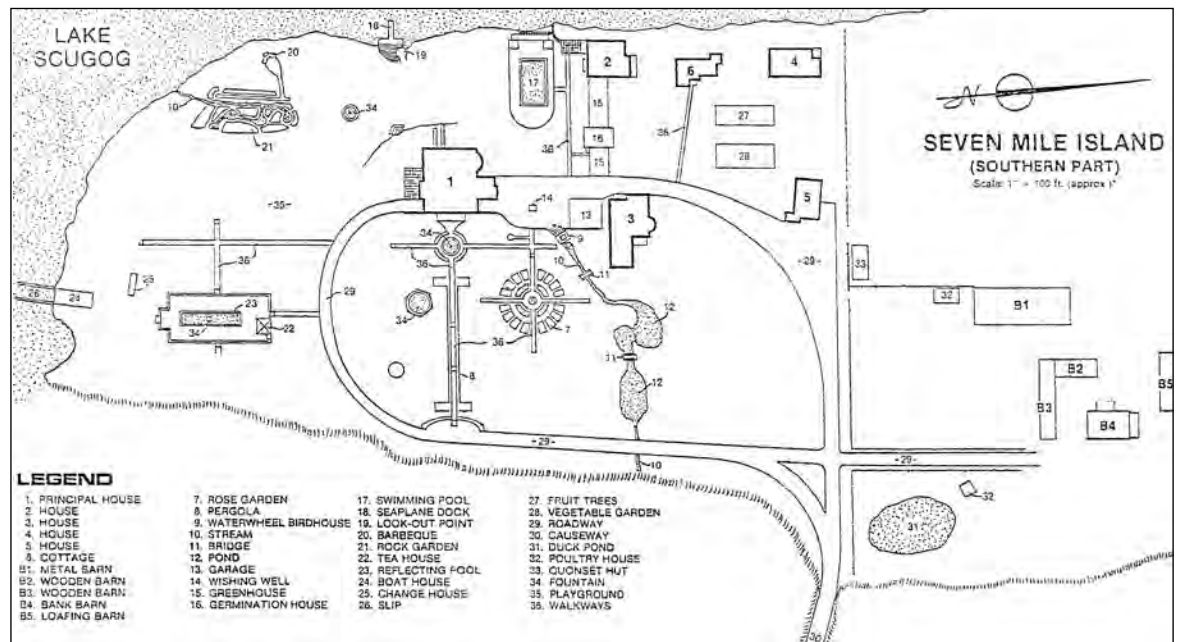
I will get to the garden, and then the agricultural part of the complex, soon.

Take care,  
Eleanor.



*The statue of Mercury, which was located in the middle of the reflecting pool beside the Tea Room.*





This site plan shows the south end of Seven Mile Island and identifies most of the buildings and features on the estate.

### Letters from Eleanor . . .

June 7, 2006

'Morning, Peter.

I think I will try to describe the garden by viewing it as half a wagon-wheel, viewed from above, with the house as the hub, each direction from the house being a spoke in the wheel.

Leaving the house we would have a choice of directions to take: we might choose to step out through the screened porch off the living room, and face west toward the lake across the wide lawn. The first spoke in the wheel.

On our right would be the pool, and over to the left a fountain with a little statue of a girl with lily pads and flowers that mimic the lily pads and flowers in the fountain. but we might stroll over to the lookout, that little tiled and wrought-iron railed bay that extends out over the bank.

We could sit for a while and enjoy the view: or we could walk south, passing under the long row of tall graceful elm trees that mark the shoreline, until the lawn ends and we have to search for the path through trees and shrubs.

If we follow it we find ourselves passing through a strange little formation of paths and rock work.



We would then be at the south end of the garden, and might meet someone who had started from the front door;- the second spoke of the wheel.

Walking south across the lawn they would pass to the right of a well-groomed bowling green, and beyond that, a badminton court and an archery range.

At that point we might meet and stroll together to the boathouse and perhaps pause for a while on the upper deck to watch for herons and bitterns and other wildlife in the marsh.

Coming back we might stop at the reflecting pool to watch the fish, perhaps, or, if the day is growing warm, to take cool refuge in the teahouse. Leaving there, we could





*These pictures, taken in 1925, show the framing and construction of the cement dock and entrance to the boathouse at Seven Mile Island.*



*Left, the two-storey boathouse at Seven Mile Island.*





*The tea house, right, located at the north end of the reflecting pool, which was void of water and filled with leaves in 1982.*

### Indian artifacts unearthed

Hello Peter

Another thing I meant to mention was that a rich lode of Indian artifacts was unearthed during the excavation, arrowheads, points and tools of all description, grinding stones and other items.

They were all stored in a cupboard under the stairs and I don't suppose the new owners had any idea that they were found on the premises.

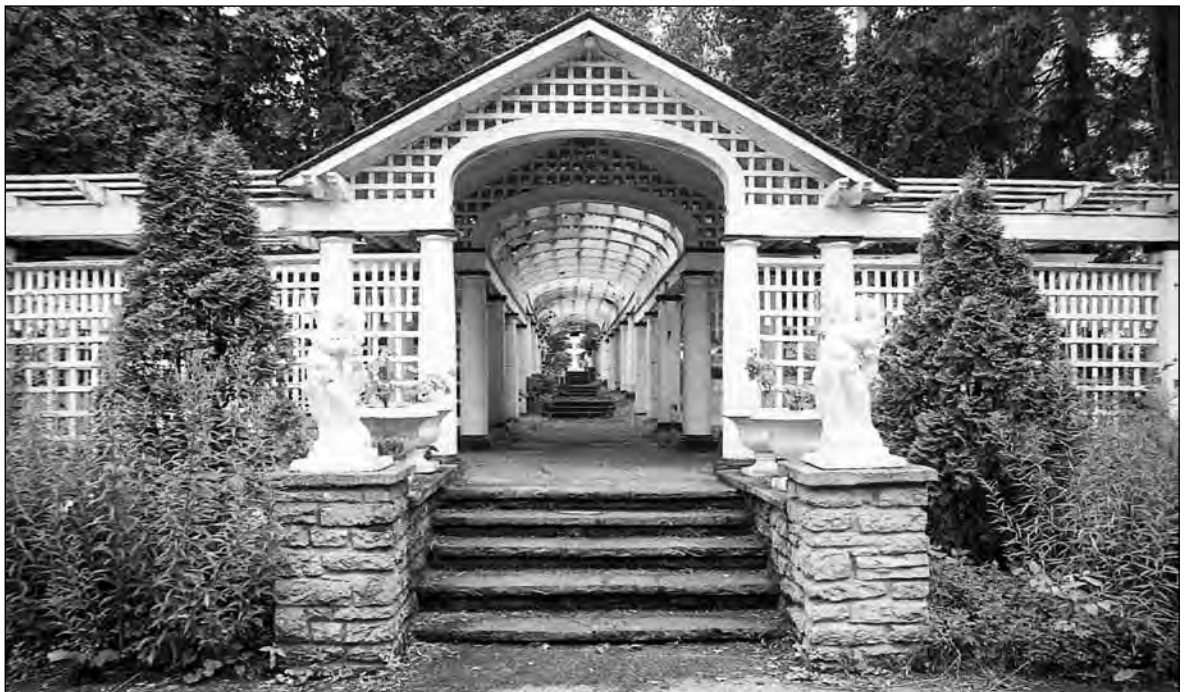
Tomorrow: The garden, I promise.  
Eleanor

take the paved walk up to the drive and return to the house.

Back at the house, if we stand under the portico and look along the third spoke of the wheel toward the east, we are facing a wide half-circle of garden with walkways and flower beds filled with fragrant peonies and delphinium.

A high white lattice screen curves around to embrace it. The screen is divided in the center to open into a long pergola. Against each half of the screen stands a statue, a nymph on the left, a satyr on the right, each half- turned to the other to exchange a glance.

We may choose to walk down through the rose- covered pergola which descends very gently to the eastern edge of the garden, or we may turn to the right and passing through a hedge, come upon a fountain built in the shape of a beehive, of rocks and whimsy. It is populated by sculpted elves and fairies, frogs and rabbits with water trickling down over mossy stones.



*Entrance to the magnificent white lattice covered pergola, which leads to a large fountain near the main residence.*



*Above, a large dove aviary with an old mill-wheel which turns, moving water through a series of small canals in the flower gardens.*

*Below, a unidentified woman and child relax beside the reflecting pool and tea house about 1920 at Seven Mile Island.*

If we leave this fantasy we enter another garden space of lawn and a more sober fountain with a dignified tier of splash basins.

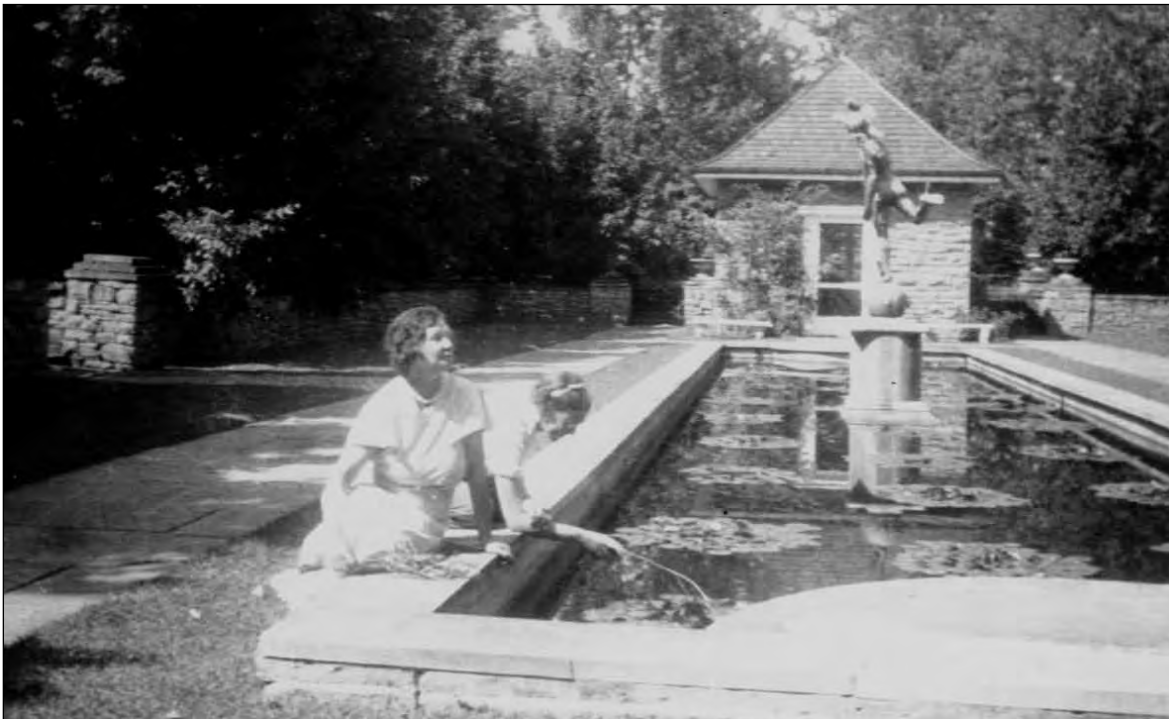
A swing round to the left will take us back to the pergola, and crossing through it we find ourselves in the rose garden, a circle divided into concentric circles, and then again by paths raying out from the center where a gazing-globe standing on a pedestal reflects the fan-shaped beds edged with box and filled with roses, the whole surrounded by a clipped cedar hedge.

"There is a tall structure on our right that appears to be a windmill, but is in fact a pigeon house."

Here we will turn west again and pass through the hedge. A walkway will take us back to the house and the drive as it widens to approach the garage; but first, on our right there is a tall structure that appears to be a windmill but is in fact a pigeon house. White fan-tail pigeons, and pouter-pigeons strut pridefully about, showing off their plumage and impressive fan of feathers.

A few more steps and we come to the well, a heavy stone structure with a handsome roof of thick cedar-shakes. We might mistake it for another garden fancy but it is a working well, supplying the house with cold, clear drinking water as the only potable alternative to the fishy-tasting lake water.

Now we are almost back to the swimming pool and have completed our walk around the garden but we'll just look inside the white lattice fence at the pool-surround of







*A view of the Wilson's residence taken near the fountain in the floral gardens just east of the house.*

paving and Turkish tiles, the roses lining the fence and spilling over Turkish urns. the white painted lounge area flanked by cabanas .

We've done the tour of the oldest part of the garden but there is one thing more.

I had said my grandparents wanted a Japanese Garden and it was finally installed, the last garden area to be so, but it is outside of the half wagon-wheel device I chose and in a new part of the whole complex.



To reach it you would walk through the rose garden and a little distance away, or you could find it by returning past the pigeon house, and here's the clue.

Behind the pigeon house there is, hidden away, a large water-wheel which seems to be turning uselessly as water pours over it into a stream but if you follow the stream you come to a pond and two more ponds and you are in the Japanese garden.

"Behind the pigeon house, hidden away, is a large water-wheel which seems to be turning uselessly."

Two moon-viewing bridges arch over the ponds, young pine trees reach out to them, and large bronze cranes wade in the water. The rocks that line the shore are new and have no moss yet and the plants that dot the banks are small and immature.

It is a Japanese garden, as authentic as it can be made. but without the years of training by someone schooled in the art it can never become what it was intended to be.

That's about it, Peter - the way it was.  
Eleanor.

**Publisher's Note:** Unfortunately, repeated efforts to connect with Mrs. Jarvis were unanswered, and these emails were the last correspondence we had with her.

There were so many more questions to be answered, but thankfully, her rambling memories provided a more vivid picture of Seven Mile Island during the years the Wilson family occupied their summer home.



The colour photographs on these two pages, were taken in 1984 to be used in an brochure, advertising Seven Mile Island Resort as retreat for special occasions or for photographers and nature lovers.

Rooms in the Wilson House, the original Wilson home, Lindsay House and Durham House ranged from \$65-\$75 per night, or \$410-\$470 a week.

The brochure explained Seven Mile Island as and ideal retreat to celebrate that special anniversary or honeymoon.

"As you enter the gates, you feel that you are leaving the everyday world behind you. The drive along the causeway, which passes through a natural wildlife sanctuary, bring you to your comfortable accommodations.

"The buildings are set in magnificent grounds, a harmonious blend of landscaping and nature - walkways, fountains, statuary, reflecting pools, rock gardens and a 150 foot pergola."



Seven Mile Island Resort brochure 1984-1985





The pictures on these pages were published in a brochure promoting Seven Mile Island Resort for 1984-1985.





When the Elys purchased the Wilson Estate in 1943, the property was overgrown and in a state of disrepair. The main residence was converted into apartments for friends and family to stay during the summer.

## Seven Mile Island

*The Harry and Freda Ely years*

Following the death of her husband, Ross Wilson, Mrs. Wilson lost interest in the estate and about two years later, on September 4, 1943, she sold Seven Mile Island for a mere \$18,000 to Harry S. Ely and his wife Freda. Mr. Ely was one of a group of four men who joined forces to purchase the property but before the deal closed, his three partners backed out, leaving Mr. Ely to arrange financing for the purchase on his own.

Harry Ely was the owner of "VanKirk Chocolate Corporation," a chocolate manufacturing company located at 301 King St., Toronto. The company made chocolates and chocolate bars for a variety of stores, including Loblaws, Dominion and Eatons, and also provided chocolate bars under the "VanKirk" name for movie theaters. He was probably most famous for developing a baking product under the brand name "Chipits."

Harry Ely passed away when he was only 41-year



Harry and Freda Ely with their daughter Elizabeth at Seven Mile Island about 1948.





*The south entrance to the main residence, about 1948.*

old, but the firm continued under the management of his wife, and later with the help of Freda's second husband, Henry L. (Harry) Fogler.

The VanKirk company was sold to an American firm, and was later purchased by the Hershey Co. "Chipits" are still produced by Hershey today, using the same logo designed by Harry Ely more than 60 years ago.

Mrs. Freda (Ely) Fogler, now more than 93 years of age, remembers when they purchased Seven Mile Island from Mary Wilson, it was in a state of disrepair and neglect. "The lawns looked like hay fields," she said, and remembered working "like fiends" to cut down the waist high grass and clean up the property.



*The beautiful arbor, as it looked about 1948. At the far end is the water fountain in front of the house.*



*The pictures on this page were all taken in 1943 before the Elys purchased the property. The large water fountain found in front of the main residence was often used as a wading pool by the children.*



## SCUGOG'S GARDEN ESTATES

While owner of Seven Mile Island, Harry Ely also purchased two farms adjacent to the island estate, but outside the main gates on the mainland of Scugog Island.

Mrs. Fogler recalled that the family was not initially received with open arms in the community, speculating it may have had something to do with them being Jewish. Gradually the family did become accepted, and they did much of their shopping in town for groceries and summer clothing. She particularly remembered shopping at Bentley's Jewellers, Brock's Department Store and the two local grocery stores, Dowson's Red & White and McKee's Superior store.

Freda Ely spent most summers at Seven Mile Island with her two young children, and her parents, who lived in a small cottage on the property overlooking the lake. Mr. Ely lived at their Old Forest Hill Rd. home during the week, while he was tending to business, but arrived at Seven Mile Island almost every weekend to relax and to enjoy his leisure time raising and breeding Palomino ponies.

They converted the large residence into apartments in which family and friends could stay for the summer months and enjoy horseback riding, swimming, sailing, pool-side parties and leisurely strolls around the beautiful grounds.

There were about 16 children of various family members living at Seven Mile Island throughout the summer, so a day camp was started, with a camp director and counsellors hired to run the children's programs. "Camp Ely" was operated near the reflecting pool and also in the upper storey of the boat house. The Elys provided playground equipment, swings and a sandbox, and the councillors taught the children crafts, played water games in shallow water of the reflecting pool, learned how to ride ponies and enjoyed hayrides. The children also had a roped-off area in the lake, near the boathouse, where they swam and played in the shallow water along the shoreline.

Camp Ely provided summer programs for 16 children of family members who spent the summer living at Seven Mile Island.



*The children of "Camp Ely" posed for this picture in front of the big house during the summer of 1950.*





*These stone pillars, built in the shape of cigars, guard the entrance to Seven Mile Island. The pillars were built by Scottish stonemasons hired by Alex Wilson after they had completed building Casa Loma in Toronto.*

Among the noted families who brought their children to the island camp was comedian Frank Shuster.

Rumors that the property was being used as a refugee camp, for children rescued from Europe during the war, are unfounded, but the fact there was a summer camp for children on the estate, may have led to this rumour.

Although Harry Ely died in 1950, it wasn't until June 1958, that Mrs. Ely disposed of their summer home. She said the Island was truly a wonderful place filled with many unforgettable memories, and regretted having to give it up.

Rumours of children rescued from the horrors of war were being kept there were unfounded.



*This building photographed in 1948, became the summer residence of Harry and Freda Ely.*



Patrick 'Paddy' Harrison



*The Wilson Home, pictured during the winter of 1970.*

## Seven Mile Island

### *The Patrick Harrison years*

Mrs. Fogler sold Seven Mile Island for about \$50,000 to a company called Harrison Holdings, which was owned by Patrick Harrison and his wife Lucette.

Mr. Harrison was a mining engineer at the time, and initially he and his wife used the property as a summer retreat. Eventually, the Harrisons moved in and took up permanent residence at Seven Mile Island, spending an estimated \$1 million on improvements to the property, including construction of two guest houses for his daughters.

Mr. Harrison continued to live on the property for a number of years following the death his first wife, but in September 1981 at the age of 80 years, he decided to sell the estate and listed the property with W. Frank Real Estate of Port Perry.

The property was originally listed in for \$750,000 but it took almost two years to sell the property. But finally, ownership changed in July 1983, with a registered Ontario corporation with Chinese principals purchasing the estate property for \$630,000.



*The former Wilson House, home to Patrick and Carmelle Harrison, when they lived on Seven Mile Island in 1982.*



# Tour of Seven Mile Island

*By J. Peter Hvidsten - July 1982*

The Harrison's held an Open House on Seven Mile Island in July 1982, inviting a number of area residents to their island retreat for a barbeque and to view the property, which they had just listed for sale.

To reach the 26 acre estate property, we pass through two tall, cigar-shaped pillars and proceed along a narrow 1,650 foot causeway. Over-grown brush and trees crowd the roadway and provide a beautiful canopy for the brief trip between mainland Scugog Island and this private hideaway situated in the middle of 65 acres of wildlife sanctuary.

Upon reaching the island, the narrow roadway winds past two of the five houses on the property before ending in front of the main residence.

The two-storey "Wilson" house consists of 28-rooms and covers about 2,600 sq. ft. per floor. On the main floor is a 24'x17' kitchen which leads to a large dining area.

Beyond another set of doors is a large living room, which incorporates beamed ceilings and a fireplace. In all there are four fireplaces in the main residence. The upper floor is taken up by eight bedrooms, a large sitting room and a den.

Leaving the house, moving west along the



*The 1,650 ft. causeway leading to Seven Mile Island.*



*Long arbor leading to gardens and the main residence.*



*Entrance of the arbor leading to the residence.*



*The two-storey boathouse was located at the south end of the island on the shoreline of Lake Scugog. The second floor was surrounded by 35 large windows lighting the spacious room, below, which featured a dance floor.*



*One of the beautifully crafted stone-lined, cement walkways found throughout the property. This one leads to the lake and boathouse, seen above.*



*Photos on these pages taken August 1982*



shoreline of Lake Scugog is an enormous rock garden with a small stream running throughout and a massive stone barbecue.

Not far away is a lookout point, seaplane dock and a beautiful 50'x24' in-ground pool, surrounded by an ornate lattice fence and globe lighting. And next to the pool is a four-bedroom house with greenhouses and a germination building.

Proceeding south, past the main residence again, we come upon one of the numerous stone-lined walkways. One of these leads to the lake and a large two-storey boathouse. The upper section of this building was used for elaborate parties and dancing during the 1920s and 1930s.

Strolling from the boathouse, along another of the stone walkways, we come upon a stone teahouse nestled at the end of a 62'x14' reflecting pool. In the middle of the pool is a bronze statue of the Greek God "Mercury."

Moving along from this tranquil setting we arrive at the roadway once again, and as we travel along the circular drive we arrive at an ornate pergola flanked at the entrance by two of the dozens of statues found throughout the property.

The pergola, an ornate lattice covered walkway, leads us back towards the main residence and to a large fountain, birdhouse and beautiful gardens on the east side of the house. We also find here a large rose garden with more walkways, a stream and ponds.



*The inground swimming pool and decorative fence surrounding the pool at Seven Mile Island as it looked in 1982.*



### Patrick Harrison the mining contractor

Patrick Harrison was born in Belfast and emigrated to Canada in 1921.

After working as a miner and shaft sinker for a number of years, he became a mining contractor in 1934. His first shaft sinking contracts were in the Val-d'Or area of Quebec.

His company, Patrick Harrison & Co., was to dominate shaft sinking in North America from its inception in 1934 until its demise in the 1980s — sinking almost 600 shafts during that period.

The firm's largest and most difficult project

involved shaft-sinking and development at Inco's Thomson mine in Manitoba.

At Steep Rock Iron Mines, he was asked to lower the water level of Finlayson Lake without flooding the surrounding area. Harrison did this by driving a 10'x12' tunnel through solid rock along the route of flood channel beneath the lake; explosives were used to blow the plug out and allow the lake to drain.

Patrick "Paddy" Harrison passed died after a long illness at 93, in May 1995.

The Harrisons were known to hold lavish parties, drawing the rich and famous from all over the continent, arriving in limousines and seaplanes at the lakeside dockhouse.



*The greenhouse and cabins on Seven Mile Island as they looked in 1982.*



*Patrick and Carmelle Harrison in 1983, not long before their home on the Seven Mile Island estate property was sold.*





*Steps accented with floral pots leading to the main house, a large stone barbeque overlooking the lake ,and the fountain near the end of the beautiful gazebo are just some of the features of Seven Mile Island.*

## Seven Mile Island

*under the Taoist Society of Canada ownership*

During 1983, the Ching Chung Taoist Society of Canada, began work converting the main house into a hotel, a second residence into a restaurant and divided the remaining houses into rental units. After spending \$1.2 million to fix up the resort, the Taoist Society couldn't afford to operate the facility and were forced to sell.

The new owners hired Reg Teeny, who had experience in the travel and accommodation

industry as the resort's manager. Teeny hired 20 people to cut the three-foot tall grass and clean up the grounds, and hatched plans to attract cross-country skiers in the winter.

In an interview, Mr. Teeny said he didn't know who the owners were, as he was hired by lawyers acting for the owners, but he was given a "substantial" budget to get the doors open and a mandate to turn the resort into a successful year-



*The Seven Mile Island Resort and Island Restaurant has opened its doors for business once again. The manager of the 80 seaght dining room is Judy Casteels, seen in this picture. Resort manager Reg Teeney says hard work and strict attention to service will be the keys in putting the Scugog Island tourist attraction back on its feet. August 7, 1985*

round operation.

This would include winter and summer sports enthusiasts, small business conferences, meetings, or anybody that wanted to enjoy a few days and nights on the unique property.

In July 1985 Seven Mile Island was officially opened to the public. They opened an 80-seat restaurant, at which residents from the Scugog area enjoyed lunches and dinners, as well as leisurely strolls throughout this unique property.

The restaurant was located in a large home on the property, just steps from the former Wilson house. It was decorated to be elegant, but not overbearing, using soft pastel shades. The menu offered steak, chicken, beef, port and fresh rainbow trout at moderate prices.

Mr. Teeny said that overnight accommodations bookings were starting to increase, with eight cottages and ten guest rooms in the main lodge available, and they could handle about 40 overnight guests in comfort.

The operators also planned to build a pub in the

glassed-in section of the greenhouse which would operate year-round. It was Mr. Teeny that produced the brochure and pictures seen on pages 22-23.

This venture only last about two years, before the property was closed to the public.

In 1987 when it was leased by local real estate agent Mark Smith and his partner Greg Fish, who along with a syndicate of 12 investors formed a company with the intent of developing the property.

According to Mr. Smith, they immediately started work on restoring the property to its former glory. They repaired the pump systems for the swimming pool and fountains so they were all in working condition, and refurbished and cleaned up the property.

Their work paid off and the resort attracted a steady clientele arriving on Seven Mile Island for luncheons, dinners, strolls through the estate property and to enjoy music and dancing at "Breakers" bar in the old Wilson House.

The group soon realized there was not enough room to accommodate wedding business and larger

## Seven Mile Island

### *Harmony Island Estate*



*Bill Curry, left, and Bruce Gerrow.*

Next to lease the property was Bruce Gerrow and Bill Curry, to establish a retreat for young offenders and youths under the care of the Children's Aid Societies.

Mr. Gerrow and Mr. Curry renovated the former Seven Mile Island Resort into a facility licensed to house 24 youths, and opened "Harmony Island Estate" on October 2, 1992.

The campus included four bungalows, two which consisted of bedrooms, washrooms and common rooms. The third bungalow was for administration and the fourth a kitchen, dining room and common room.

Unfortunately, this venture did not succeed, and Harmony Island Estate for boys was closed couple of years in operation.

formal gatherings, so they began plans to demolish the old Wilson House, which was in a state of disrepair, and replace it with a 40-50 room hotel. This plan never materialized.

Other long-range plans of the investors included, the construction of stacked-townhouses along the shoreline at the north end of the island, which would provide rental units when not in use by the owners. Unfortunately, due to financial and market

conditions, the project never came to fruition.

With the closure of Harmony Island, once again the property sat virtually empty for the next few years. During this time, the grounds and features began to deteriorate rapidly, partially due to vandals who found their way onto the island estate and destroyed many of the ornate statues, buildings, fountains and structures.



# Seven Mile Island

*Swimming Pool and figurines on the estate in 1998*



*Sampling of the dozens of figurines found dotted around the grounds of Seven Mile Island in 1998.*



*The beautiful inground pool surrounded by a decorative white fence, overlooked Lake Scugog.*



# Seven Mile Island

*Gates and causeway to the resort in 2001*



*Cigar shaped posts, separated by iron fencing, surround the entrance to Seven Mile Island. The posts were created by Scottish stone masons brought in from Toronto, after they finished work on Casa Loma. At right, is the iron gate at the entrance.*



*This narrow 1,600 foot causeway, cuts through acres of environmental land lined with trees which provide a beautiful canopy for the trip between the mainland of Scugog Island and the private estate on Seven Mile Island.*



# Seven Mile Island

## *The "Artis Orbus" arts group years*

During the summer of 1998, after nearly 20 years of ownership by the Taoist Society, Seven Mile Island was once again listed for sale.

Four years later, in June 2002, a group of 21 enthusiastic investors, many from the artistic community, pooled their resources and purchased the property for \$725,000, with the idea of establishing a school for the study of art. The group, Artis Orbus Inc., was headed by Charlotte Hale, owner of Veni Vidi Gallery in Port Perry.

Work began immediately on stabilizing the buildings and damaged structures, as well as cleaning and clearing the property of overgrowth created by decades of neglect.

Next the Artis Orbus group began an ambitious plan to create the Seven Mile Island Arts Community. With the assistance of a Toronto based landscape architecture company and a real estate consulting firm, a preliminary design and plan for the project was developed (*see opposite page*), and the concept was presented to the owners in the fall of 2002.

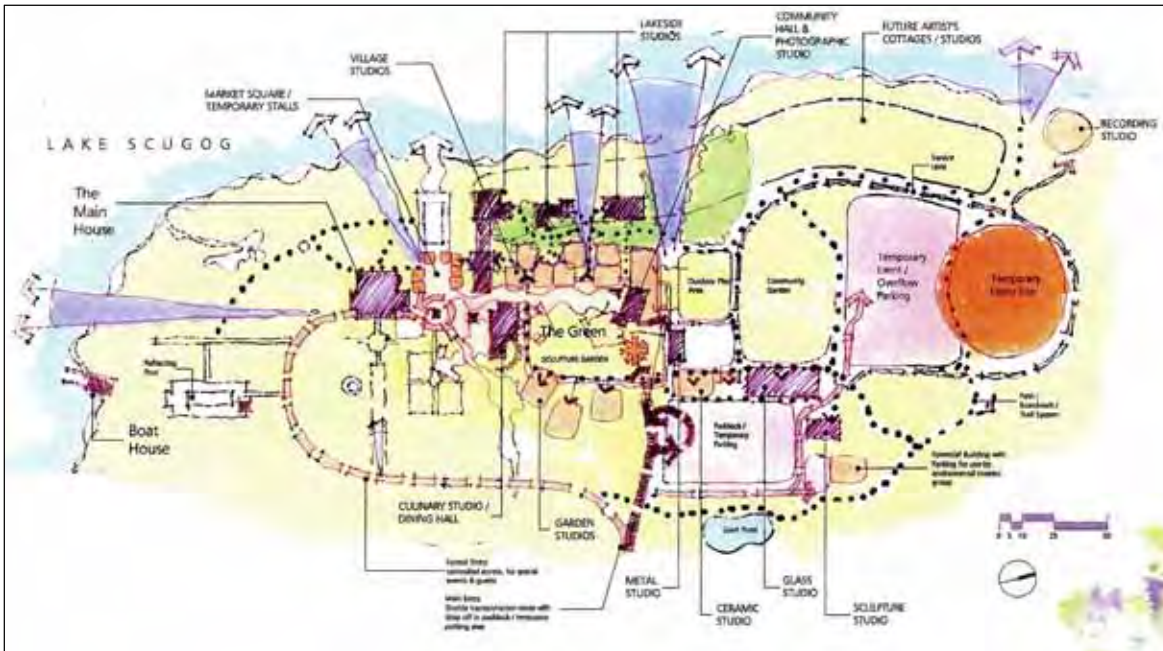
Seven Mile Island Arts Community, operated by



*Charlotte Hale with Fred Fogler in 2002.*



*In September 2002, Freda Fogler, then 92, visited Seven Mile Island for the first time since she sold the property in 1958. She is seen here with, from left, her niece Elaine Lewis, daughter Elizabeth Ely and far right, Charlotte Hale of Artis Orbus.*



SEVEN MILE ISLAND ARTS COMMUNITY

# Preliminary Design Concept

**A. Community Hall:** A multi-purpose community outreach building for larger gatherings / workshops / photo studio / daycare or day camp. The intent would be to build onto the existing building with a 'town hall' prominence terminating the view from the causeway entrance from one direction and the Inn from the other.

**B. Village Studio:** 7 units @ approximately 750 sq. ft each semi or detached. The design intent is that it would be very cottage-like with a working studio in each/ facing the lane and simple living accommodations to the rear. The studios would be linked by courtyards and gateways; creating a village garden character.

**C. Garden Studio:** 3 units with 1 or 2 bedrooms. These bungalows would sit in the park and enclose the town common / main street with a natural edge. These studios for artists with art forms requiring greater display space.

**D. Temporary Stalls:** Located in the Market Square, ± 7 Temporary Stalls for artists with studios from outside of the community/ students/ workshops/ culinary treats or visiting artists. These could be structures erected on an as-needed basis. This would be a hard paved area, with a temporary use/ allowing it to exist for the most part as a public forecourt to the Inn/ Pool/ Water / Garden Features and Dining Hall/ as well as to facilitate vehicular use by the shuttle and service vehicles.

**E. Dining Hall:** The main dining room and center for culinary workshops. It should have excellent access and visibility to the square and main street with opportunities for street cafe tables and courtyard dining terraces. It should also have a connection to the herb / vegetable garden.

**F. Inn:** The main house is restored to accommodate 10 guest rooms. This area/ including boathouse and gardens/ should be restored and maintained as a historic feature of the site. Public access and uses en mass should be only for

special events to preserve the fragility and integrity of the estate environment. It would be perfect for winter/ holiday events or as a meeting place for studio tours.

**G. Greenhouse:** Renovate / restore as a garden art arario/ with potential opportunity for winter greenhouse/ tearoom. It could also accommodate garden restoration efforts / workshops / working holidays.

**H. Pool:** Restored to former glory for use by community guests. It should sit visibly on the Market Square.

**I. Lakeside Studios:** 4-5 units from the 3 existing buildings, converted into semi-private accommodation, and common with views to the lake. They could be reserved for visiting artists / workshop instructors. While linked by pathways and garden courtyards to the Village Studios.

**J. Artist Cottages:** Approximately 11 detached cottages. Each cottage would have a spectacular view of the lake and sunsets. They may be similar to the 'Honeymoon' cottages at Seaside/ Florida and represent the opportunity to reflect the style and design theme of this development.

We are also indicating potential opportunities for adding buildings/ as studio workshops or for rent/lease by outside groups. We have maintained the parking/ access per Charlotte Hale's concept/ of primarily shuttle transportation only/ from the 'mainland'. We caution that the trees lining this causeway/ providing a great deal of character now/ do not appear to be in good condition. Consideration should be given to widening the causeway to fully service the island and to replant trees to achieve a similar character but with long term planning. Opportunities for event or service parking on the island have been indicated in the paddock area and the open field to the north.

*Report Prepared by Baker Turner Inc. and N. Barry Lyon Consultants Ltd., Toronto.*





*Local politicians and many residents and supporter from the area were on hand for the official opening of Artis Orbus on Seven Mile Island in October 2002. From left, John O'Toole, MPP Durham, Scugog Mayor Doug Moffat, Bob Strickert, and Alex Shepherd, MP Durham Region.*

Artis Orbus, held an official opening of the refurbished estate property in October 2002 with a large crowd of invited guests and dignitaries on hand for the official ribbon cutting, which took place at the entrance to the arbor.

Following the formal opening, guests were invited to enjoy the property and take part in a guided tour through the former Seven Mile Island estate.

Unfortunately, the ambitious plans for the estate arts community never did materialize, partly due to financial constraints and also differing opinions of investors on how to proceed.

Despite the problems, the Seven Mile Island Arts Community operated for about two years before making the tough decision to cease operations and sell the property. Sadly, in the spring of the group listed the Wilson's estate property for sale.

Seven Mile Island was placed on the market for sale in early 2005 with a price tag of \$1,250,000.

The Mississaugas of Scugog First Nation purchased the former estate property in mid-June 2005.

### **7 Mile Island For Sale**

A real estate sales pamphlet in 1998 described the property as follows:

*"Seven Mile Island is approximately 95 acres of land which includes a 27 acre Island, 28 acres on the mainland and 40 acres of submerged land. Twelve acres of the property is being used as a resort which consists of:*

- *The Scugog House (restaurant)*
- *The Wilson House (bar, video room, office and 10 rooms)*
- *Durham House (four cabins)*
- *Lindsay House (four cabins)*
- *Storage house*
- *Caretakers house*
- *Greenhouse*
- *Tea house*
- *Boat house*
- *Garage*
- *Three barns*
- *Tennis courts*
- *Inground pool, two sets of docks, six fountains and five ponds or pools*





By the fall of 2003, this magnificent estate had become overgrown, run down and was deteriorating from lack of care and maintenance.



*Photos taken August 2003*



Buildings and structures on the Seven Mile Island estate were in an unfortunate state of disrepair by late in 2003



*Above: The dove aviary*



*Left: The Wilson House in disrepair.*

*Below: Statue of Mercury with boathouse.*





# Seven Mile Island

## *The Mississaugas of Scugog Island, First Nation*

Not long after Seven Mile Island was listed for sale in 2005, the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation made a decision to purchase the property, closing the deal in mid-June 2005 for \$1,250,000.

“The opportunity to buy it came up quickly and we purchased the property,” Tracy Gauthier, chief of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, told the Port Perry Star during an interview.

Following the purchase of the Seven Mile Island property, Mississaugas officials began the job of cleaning up the property which had continued to deteriorate over the years.

The work included the demolition of the former Wilson House and one cottage, both of which were unsafe and beyond repair. They also filled in the inground swimming pool which was in poor shape

and dangerous due to neglect.

Chief Gauthier noted, following the purchase, that she was not sure what the future held for the island property, but it had potential for the future.

Twelve years later, August 2017, during an announcement regarding the new operators of the Great Blue Heron gaming hall, Chief Kelly LaRocca commented on the former island retreat.

She said the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation were continuing to explore development ideas for the Seven Mile Island property, but didn't believe it would become the home of a new casino.

“I think our people would like to see something to complement gaming, not depend on it,” said Chief LaRocca, hinting at perhaps a hotel, cultural centre or something to do with cultural tourism.



This 2006 Google Earth map shows an aerial view of Seven Mile Island and its surroundings. Identified are: (A) Seven Mile Island; (B) Causeway to the Seven Mile Island; (C) Seven Mile Island Road; (D) Island Road; and (E) Great Blue Heron Casino.





Random photos taken about 2011 of Seven Mile Island as Mother Nature appears to be gradually taking hold of this former elegant estate property.

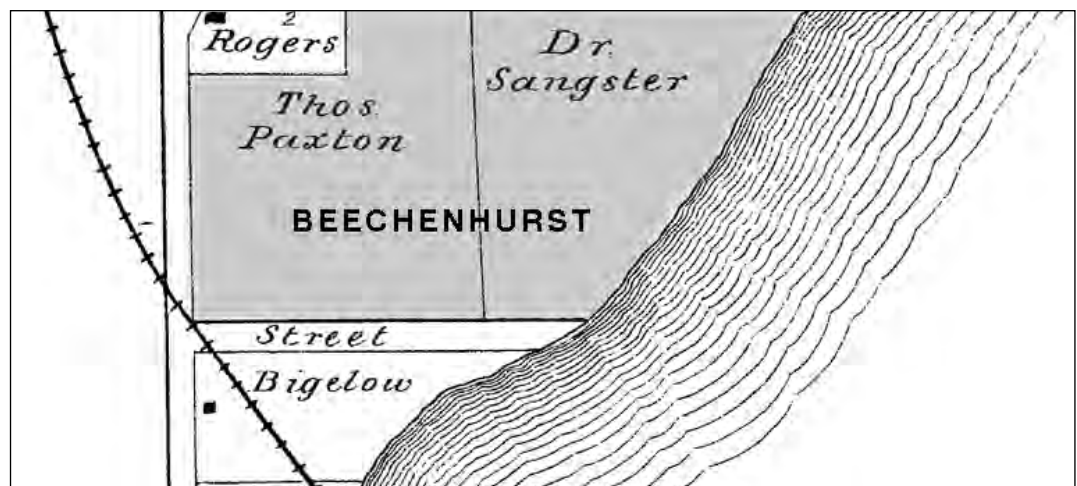


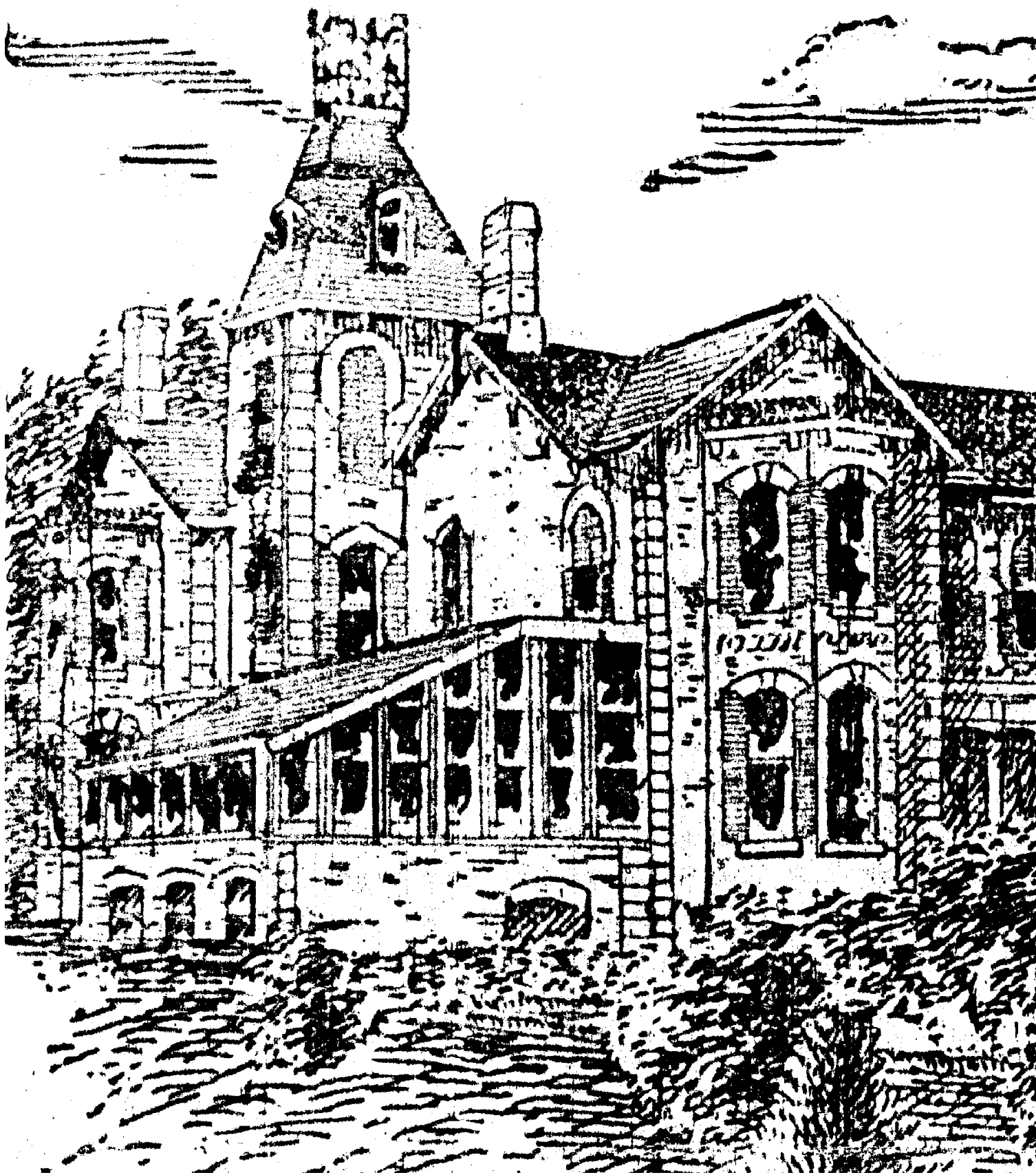






# Beechenhurst Kent Estates









# Beechenhurst

Estate home of  
Dr. J.H. Sangster and his wife Carolyn.



This magnificent estate home, the residence of Dr. J.H. Sangster and his wife Caroline was once described as one of the stateliest and choicest houses in the land. The home was built following the destruction of their first home by fire on March 7, 1881.

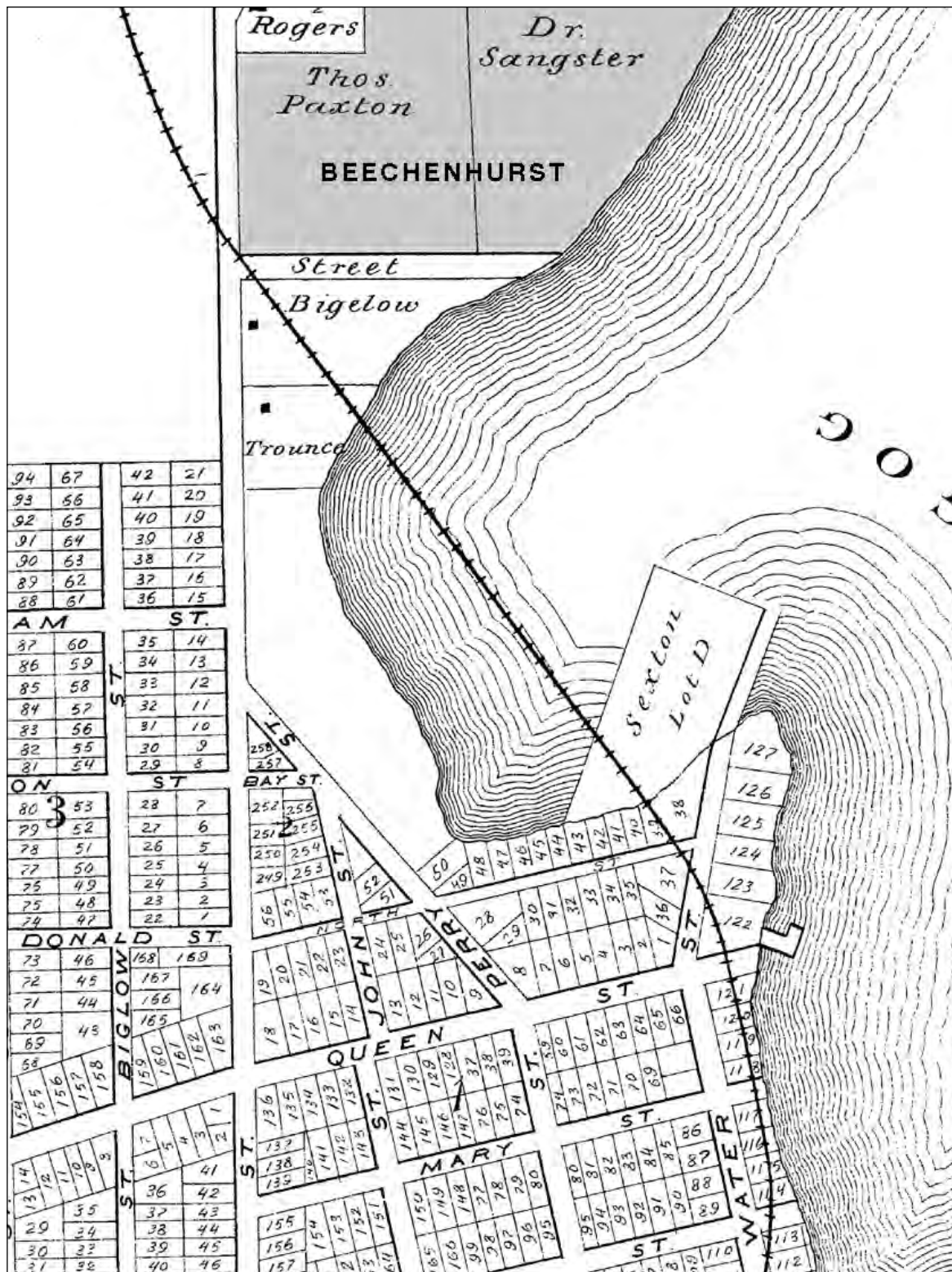
The Sangster home was beautifully located at the northern edge of the town, on a low rise of land overlooking Lake Scugog and Scugog Island.

The commodious house was constructed of white brick and trimmed with elaborate wood ornamentation and ironwork on the roof.

Most of the round-topped windows were accented with shutters and the porches and verandas were beautifully crafted.

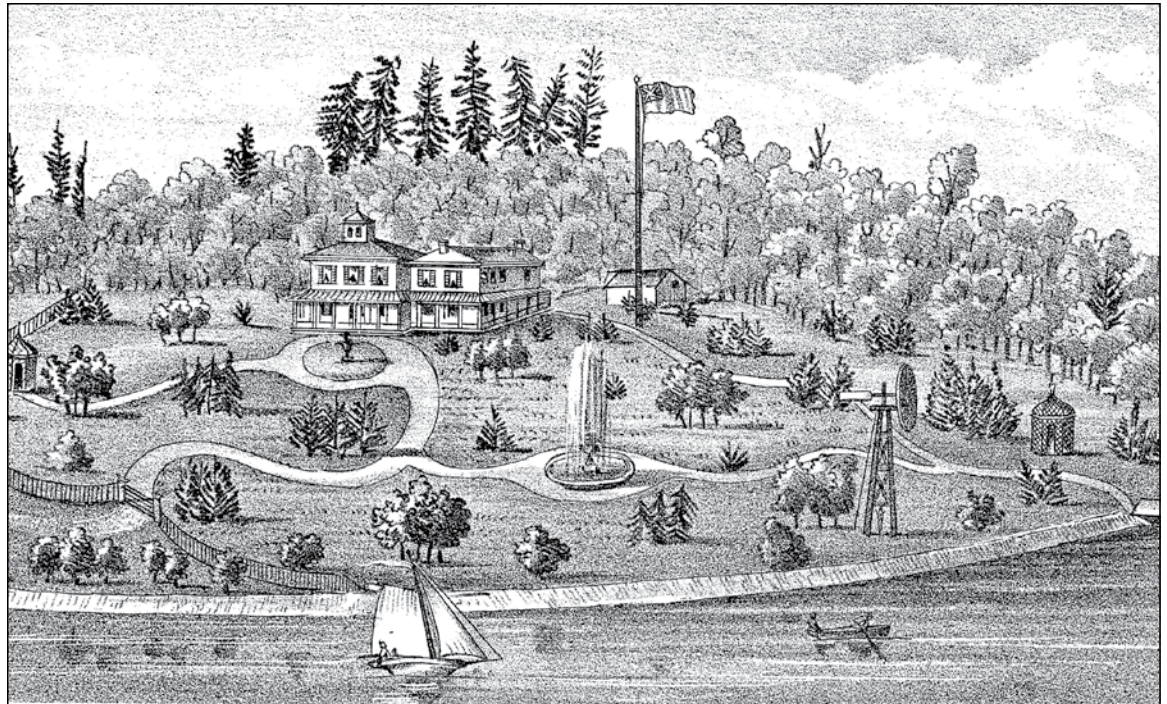
The expansive grounds which surrounded the house, featured extensive environmental gardens, groves of beeches and several acres of primitive forest. The residence had a well-stocked conservatory as well as grape and hot houses.

Dr. Sangster and his wife lived here from 1882 to 1893, when their magnificent home was also destroyed by fire.



Beechenhurst was located just north of downtown Port Perry on a secluded piece of land overlooking Lake Scugog. The property was later purchased by Frederick & Ethel Kent. During their ownership the property became known Kent Estates.





*The Beechenhurst residence of Dr. J.H. Sangster, as illustrated in the Historical Atlas of Ontario County, 1877,*

## Beechenhurst

*Estate home of Dr. J.H. Sangster*

Hidden away in the north-east corner of Port Perry, far away from the hustle and bustle of this active and industrious community was one of the town's most magnificent and desirable properties during the early part of the twentieth century.

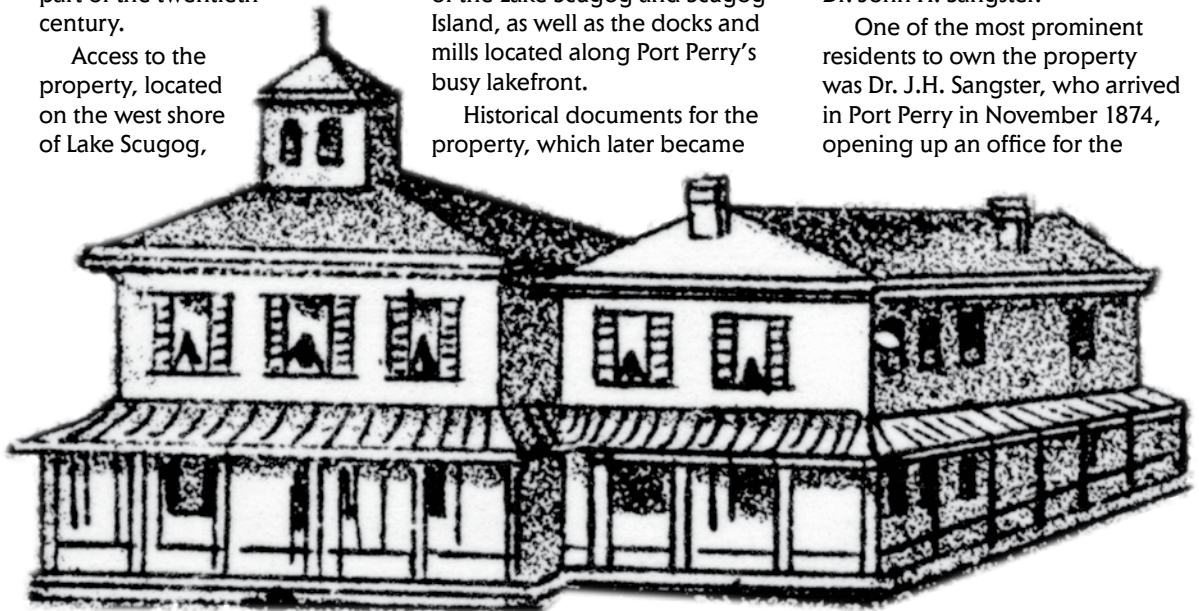
Access to the property, located on the west shore of Lake Scugog,

just north of the town, was along a narrow dirt road overgrown with trees which opened up at the top of a hill and sloped to the edge of the lake. From this vantage point, there was a panoramic south-easterly view of the Lake Scugog and Scugog Island, as well as the docks and mills located along Port Perry's busy lakefront.

Historical documents for the property, which later became

known as Beechenhurst, date back to the early 1800s. There have been numerous owners of the land over the past 150 years, including: Thomas Paxton; Joseph Bigelow; Hugh Lucas; James Carnegie; Madison Williams and Dr. John H. Sangster.

One of the most prominent residents to own the property was Dr. J.H. Sangster, who arrived in Port Perry in November 1874, opening up an office for the



*Dr. Sangsters home, enlarged from above photo, overlooked Lake Scugog north of the town of Port Perry.*

Dr. Sangster moved to Port Perry in 1874 set up a medical practice, and constructed his new home in the north end of town.

practice of medicine at the corner of Queen and Perry Streets.

Not long after arriving in the village, Dr. Sangster purchased an attractive piece of property on the west side of Lake Scugog north of Port Perry. It was here, nestled among the trees on the slope of a hill, he built a large beautiful home overlooking the lake and the village of Port Perry to the south.

He also commenced work on creating beautiful floral gardens, installing fountains and building walkways throughout the property stretching from his home all the way to the shoreline of the lake.

He named his new residence "Beechenhurst," due to the large concentration of Beech trees on the property. Access to his home was inconvenient, being located north of the property along the seventh concession of Reach, so Dr. Sangster petitioned the village council to build a new street. To his delight, in May 1877 Beech Street was opened.

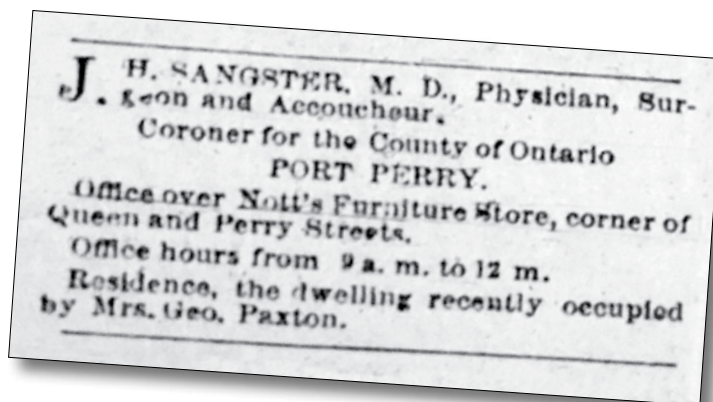
Dr. Sangster continued to manicure and improve his property until disaster struck. About 4 a.m. on March 7, 1881 his new home was found to be on fire. All efforts to extinguish the roaring blaze failed and within four hours the house and its contents were completely destroyed.

After his home was burned to the ground, Dr. Sangster began plans to build a new house, larger

and more elegant than his previous residence. The result was a magnificent home.

An artist's rendering of the house (page 38, 39), accompanied by a detailed description was published in the 1886 Toronto Globe newspaper. The description follows....

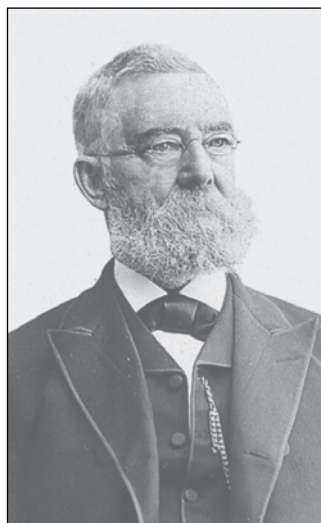
*"The residence of Dr. J.H. Sangster is beautifully located on the west bank of Lake Scugog, within the corporation of Port Perry. The house, built by the present owner, is of white brick and is surrounded by very extensive environmental grounds which besides the groves of beeches on the western shore, include several acres of primitive forest, fully improved and detailed.*



*Ontario Observer, January 1892*

*The residence with its ample and well-stocked conservatory is said to be one of the finest in the province - its grape and hot houses and grounds form a lovely picture from the lake, and constitute one of the stateliest and choicest houses in the land.*

*Dr. Sangster is at present engaged in a very large and lucrative medical practice. He was*



**DR. JOHN HERBERT SANGSTER**

Dr. John H. Sangster was a notable figure in the Canadian medical and education world

Born in London, England on March 26, 1829 he came to Canada with his parents. He received his early education at Upper Canada College, and worked in education until 1871, filling the positions of head master at a number of schools in Toronto and Hamilton.

While teaching as a professor of chemistry and botany at Rolph's Medical School, he began the study of medicine and earned his degree of M.D.

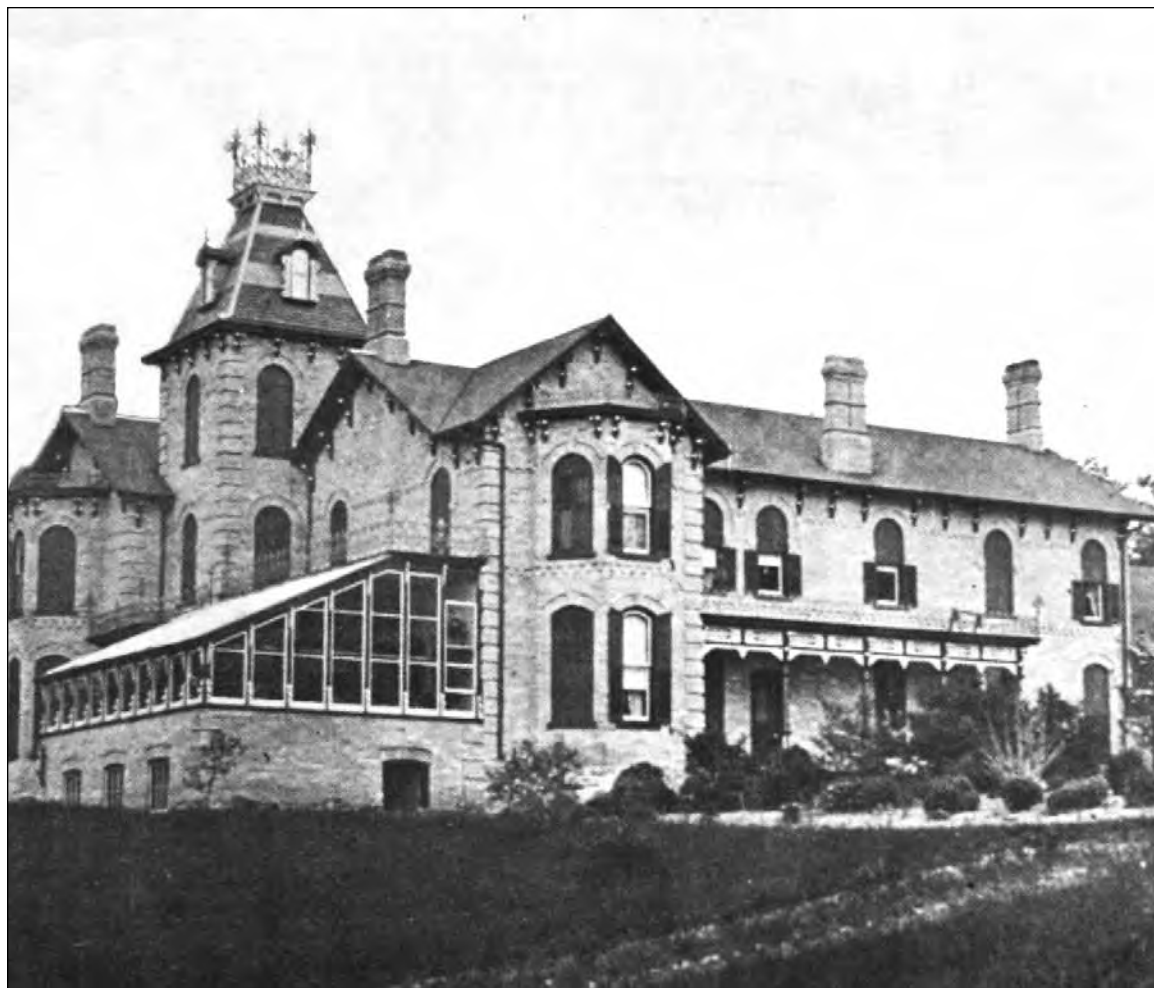
In November 1874 Dr. Sangster moved to Port Perry and set up a medical practice, and constructed a new home at the north end of the town.

Dr. Sangster was a man of exceptional ability and commanded the respect and admiration of all those who knew him. He served as a member of the Ontario Medical Council, published a number of school text books, and was often called on to be a guest speaker.

Dr. Sangster was twice married, in 1851 to Miss Mary Price of Toronto and in 1871 to Miss Caroline Elizabeth McCausland, of Toronto.

He passed away at the King Edward Hotel, Toronto on Jan. 27, 1904, after suffering from a serious heart attack. He was buried at Pine Grove Cemetery, Prince Albert.





*Dr. Sangster's second home "Beechenhurst" was this huge yellow brick house which took on the form of a rambling gothic baronial mansion. It featured an elaborate four-storey tower crowned with ironwork, verandahs, a glass conservatory and the tall sturdy ornamentally capped*

*chimneys. It also featured decorative brackets to the roof with its low pitched gables, the relief like caps to the curved topped windows with their shutters. These were all features of an Italianate villa belonging to an extremely wealthy family.*

**"The whole structure was enveloped in flames so that the building and contents were in a short time destroyed by the devouring element."**

*formerly principal of the Toronto Normal School, and is well known as an author of the school books in exclusive use from 1860 to 1870.*

*He was for twelve years professor of chemistry and botany in the Medical Department of the University of Victoria College, and for the seven years immediately prior to his removal to Port Perry in 1874 he was a member of the Board of Examiners of the Medical Council. He has thus been most intimately connected with both the general and medical education of the province.*

*If this house had survived, it would have been*

*one of the most elaborate in the province.*

*Unfortunately in the early morning hours of February 28, 1893, a fire broke out and the home was totally destroyed. A report in the North Ontario Observer described the loss:*

*"The whole structure was enveloped in flames so that the building and contents were in a short time destroyed by the devouring element. Only a few articles were saved. This was one of the most magnificent and best appointed residences in the province and was furnished in a manner rarely excelled anywhere. The loss is a heavy one, there being only an insurance of \$3,500 on the building and \$3,000 on the contents."*

*Not long after losing his second home to fire, Dr. Sangster sold what remained of his Beechenhurst property to Jonathan Blong, a local businessman in January 1895.*

# Beechenhurst

*Estate home of Jonathan Blong*



*Jonathan Blong*

Jonathon Blong was the builder of the beautiful Blong Block on Queen Street.

Jonathan Blong purchased the "Beechenhurst" property from Dr. J.H. Sangster in 1895 and built a large new frame house on the property.

Mr. Blong came to Port Perry about 1882, and immediately took a keen interest in the town. An accident in early life deprived him of the use of one of his legs, and made it difficult for him to enter business in the ordinary way; but he invested money wisely in the purchase and selling of properties.

During his years in business, he purchased the large Royal Arcade building from Joseph Bigelow and converted half of it into one of the finest, hotels in the province, the Brunswick House.

Following destruction of the Royal Arcade building by fire in 1884, he constructed the Blong Block on Queen Street. The building was described as the most pretentious and extensive business structure in Port Perry. It was a two-storey, red brick building, elaborately decorated with white brick facings and a frontage of over 100 feet on Queen St. The building still stands to this day.

Although it was reported he was very attached to the estate, being an avid outdoorsman, Mr. Blong sold it about 1908 to William E. Gimby and moved to Toronto after his health began to fail.



*A family gathering outside the Kent Estate home of Frederick Kent about 1911.*



# Beechcroft

## *Residence of Frederick A. Kent*

Mr. Gimby owned the property for only a short time before Frederick Kent arrived by car in Port Perry in May 1911 looking for a suitable location for a summer home. He ended up purchasing the house and eight acres of land from Mr. Gimby for the sum of \$5,500.

On learning of the purchase, Port Perry Star publisher Samuel Farmer wrote the following article in the newspaper:

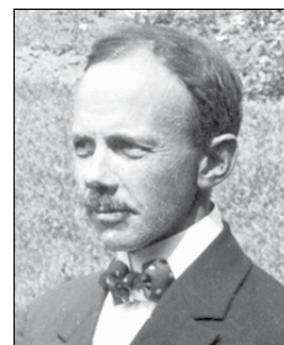
*"We are pleased to be able to announce that the Gimby property has been sold to Mr. Frederick A. Kent, of Toronto, one of the firm of jewellers of that name.*

*Mr. Kent came to town last week in his auto. He said that he had been looking for a property suitable for a summer residence at a convenient distance from Toronto. By means of his auto the distance by time between Port Perry and Toronto is very short.*

*We congratulate Mr. Kent on having secured so desirable a property; and the town in securing so excellent a citizen. Port Perry is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful of Ontario towns and would prove a most suitable place for such persons who enjoy the freedom, and quiet of country life."*

Frederick Kent became the man most responsible for the development of the property, turning it into a spectacular garden paradise in just a few short years. One year after purchasing the property, Mr. Kent was reported to have started extensive improvements to the land, installing new waterworks, reshaping and levelling the lawns, building a bowling green, a house for the caretaker and his family; and building a new driveway. On seeing the need for more acreage to fulfill his plans, he purchased an additional 17 acres of adjoining land from Silas E. VanCamp for \$6,650.

Work continued for years as Mr. Kent developed the property, putting in terraced gardens and lawns, a reflecting pool, fountains, urns and planting thousands of flowers and installing all the necessary irrigation. It was during this period Mr. Kent renamed the property "Beechcroft", the name by which it was referred to most frequently during this period. In June 1921, Mr. Kent graciously announced that he would be opening the gardens of his



Frederick A. Kent

About 1920, Frederick Kent renamed his property "Beechcroft."



Frederick Kent was a member of the Kent Bros. family who were the manufacturer of watches, gold and silverware and clocks at 168 Yonge St., Toronto.

His father Ambrose Kent operated the store with his sons until about 1893.



From the 1895 Amrose Kent & Sons catalogue.









*Beechcroft, Port Perry, 1921*





*The magnificent gardens of Frederick A. Kent's Kent Estate Gardens' as they looked during the 1920s. In the upper photograph, Lake Scugog can be seen in the background, between the trees.*



Beechcroft home to the public everyday during the season.

After touring the estate in August 1924, Port Perry Star editor Samuel Farmer described the property as follows:

*"For many years Beechcroft, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick A. Kent, has been a noted place in Port Perry; but never so noted or so beautiful as it is today.*

*Years ago Dr. J. H. Sangster used to keep the grounds after the English fashion. In those days the natural beauty of the place was fostered by those who loved beauty and loved nature. Beechcroft has been sold a number of times during the past 20 years. Mr. Jonathan Blong was in the possession of the property for a number of years and took a real interest in the place.*

*About ten years ago Mr. Fred Kent bought the property, and from that time it has been improved year by year until it is one of the most beautiful properties in the Province.*

*Yet an uninformed stranger can come and go, little suspecting that such a beautiful spot is close at hand. Situated on the northern outskirts of the town, Beechcroft is reached at the end of an unattractive road and as you turn in the gate you will think "what a delightful place in which to rest."*

*You travel the well graveled drive in the shady coolness of the overhanging trees, through the openings of which gleams of brilliant color can be*

*seen in the sunlight- perhaps a bed of tuberous begonias, some flaming cannas, giant castor beans, asters with great plumed heads in white and the many shades of red, mauve, and purple, or the glorious white blossoms of the hydrangeas.*

*And all above the trees, clumps of sturdy beeches just now loaded with nuts; evergreens whose branches sweep the ground and shrubbery in pleasing variety mingling with hollyhocks, sweet William, golden glow, delphinium, spirea and flowers that keep a covering of bloom on the well tilled beds.*

*With all the trees and flowers, there are spacious well-kept lawns, some with a delightful roll to them, and others terraced masses of close clipped green. In the trees and on the lawns, martens and song birds thrive.*

*Such is the approach to the Rose Gardens. In a place which nature seems to have reserved for just such a purpose as this, stands this crowning evidence of what man and nature can produce when they work in harmony.*

*Your first impression will be one of wonder that the richness such as lies before you could be hidden away on the lake shore. The trimness and cleanness of it all are emphasized by the mirror pool with its arched sprays playing in the sunlight. White urns containing boxwood trees stand sentry at each of the short flights of white steps that lead from the higher to the lower terraces. A sundial is*



*Two views of the terraced 'middle' gardens located on the sloping hill overlooking Lake Scugog. The property was tiered and decorated with dozens of urns, benches, flowers, trees and shrubs.*

placed here, and a great mirrored globe there, each in the place where it belongs, while at convenient viewpoints garden seats and tables in white are placed. Best of all in this white ornamentation are the summer houses in which you can sit and, through a visit of trees, look out over Lakes Scugog.

In this setting of green and white, the roses grow; hundreds of them. The collection includes many rare species, and individual flowers and masses of bloom vie with each other in securing the admiration of the visitor. As the season advances the roses come and go, but through all the summer there is a profusion of these glorious flowers.

Viewing with the rose gardens are the immense peony beds - now past bloom - and the dahlia and gladioli plantings.

You are at perfect liberty to visit Beechcroft and Mr. Kent has with unusual courtesy invited the public to visit the grounds. Such kindness is thoroughly appreciated, not only by Port Perry people, many of whom make frequent trips to the gardens; but by those from a distance. On a recent Sunday, fully fifty auto loads were visitors. Only last Sunday a party drove all the way from Hamilton to see the gardens.

There is one defect to this picture and that is the road that leads to and from the main highway to Beechcroft. It is too narrow and quite unsuited to the growing traffic demands, but it is expected that this defect will soon be remedied."

Over the next decade Mr. Kent welcomed visitors from all over Ontario to his magnificent property. On one occasion in July 1924 it was reported that over 2,000 people visited the grounds to view the Beechcroft Rose Gardens. It was estimated that more than 400 automobiles were lined along both sides of the road from the railway to the property, which had become known locally as Kent Estates.

Many notables came to visit the property including Lucy Maud Montgomery who recorded a visit to Kent Estates in her diary, dated Saturday September 5, 1925.

"Today we went down to see "the gardens" at Port Perry.

## Thousands of tourists come to see and tour Kent Estate Gardens

The Kent Gardens became a major provincial tourist attraction and in 1922 the *Toronto Telegram* declared they were among the most beautiful in the province.

Its popularity became very obvious when on Sunday, Sept., 17, 1923 more than 1,000 visitors came to see the dahlias in bloom in the Kent Gardens.

On another occasion, Sunday, July 7, 1924, it was reported that more than 400 automobiles and 2,000 people visited the Kent Gardens to see the roses in bloom.



Members of the Kent family relax around the reflecting pool at Beechenhurst in this 1924 photograph. They are, from left, Helen Wellington, Audrey Kent, Mary-Lou Lungston, Mrs. F.A. Kent, Mrs. Smith (mother of Mrs. F.A. Kent), Howard Wellington, Mrs. and Mr. Lungston, Mrs. Howard Wellington (Mrs. Smith's sister).



*A wealthy Toronto man is making a hobby of his gardens there. It is a wonderful spot, especially the "Italian Garden" and as I roamed about it and drank in my fill of beauty, life seemed a different thing and childhood not so far off. One felt safe from the hungry world in that garden. I came home with a fresh stock of courage and endurance."*

Lucy Maud Montgomery visited the Kent Estate Gardens several times.

Following the death of his wife, Ethel Henrietta, in January 1930, Mr. Kent announced he would not be opening his gardens at Beechcroft that summer. The entire town mourned the death of Mrs. Kent, who had formed many friends during the years she had lived in Port Perry.

Mr. Kent continued to work improving the property, doing extensive renovations to the rose gardens and grounds, but the death of his wife reduced his enthusiasm for the gardens and he closed them to the public shortly afterwards. He donated a large piece of his property, 300' x 370' fronting on Lilla Street (now Simcoe St.), to the Community Memorial Hospital on December 21, 1951. He lived at Beechcroft until April 1955, when he passed away in the hospital to which he had donated property only a few years earlier.



*Photographs taken of the interior of Mr. and Mrs. Kent's home at Beechcroft.*

*Top view shows the brightly lit parlour, and the bottom photograph shows a portion of the living room, complete with piano and fireplace.*



*A view of the Kent parlour from the opposite end of the room.*

## Lucy Maud Montgomery was a frequent visitor to Kent Estate Gardens

*September 5, 1925, Lucy Maude Montgomery wrote in her journal:*

"Today we went down to see 'the gardens' at Port Perry. A wealthy Toronto man is making a hobby of his gardens there. It is a wonderful spot, especially the 'Italian garden' and as I roamed about in it and drank my fill of beauty, life seemed a different thing and childhood not so very far off. One felt safe from the hungry world in that garden. I came home with a fresh stock of courage and endurance."



He was buried in the family plot at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in Toronto. Frederick and Ethel Kent had two children, Audrey and Beverly.

On December 22, 1958 a plan of subdivision was registered on part of the Kent property, fronting on Lilla St. (Simcoe), Beech St., Kent St. and forming a new street called Beechenhurst Place.

The remainder of Kent property was purchased in 1973 by a local development group, Vaneward Investments Limited of Port Perry. The company was comprised of local businessmen Ted Griffen, Grant MacDonald, Howard Forder and Dr. Robert McNab, who divided the property and built homes in what is now known as Kent Estates.

The old Kent homestead still remains today, at 434 Lakeshore Drive. It was purchased by Hans and Dianne Kraupa in May 1975 and later by Kenneth and Joanne Dutka.

The once magnificent gardens of Beechenhurst, which attracted thousands of visitors from across the province are little more than a memory. Thankfully postcards photographs of this estate property, taken during the 1920s, help to remind us of a time past when rose gardens flourished on this estate property.





*An elevated view of Frederick Kent's home about 1925.*

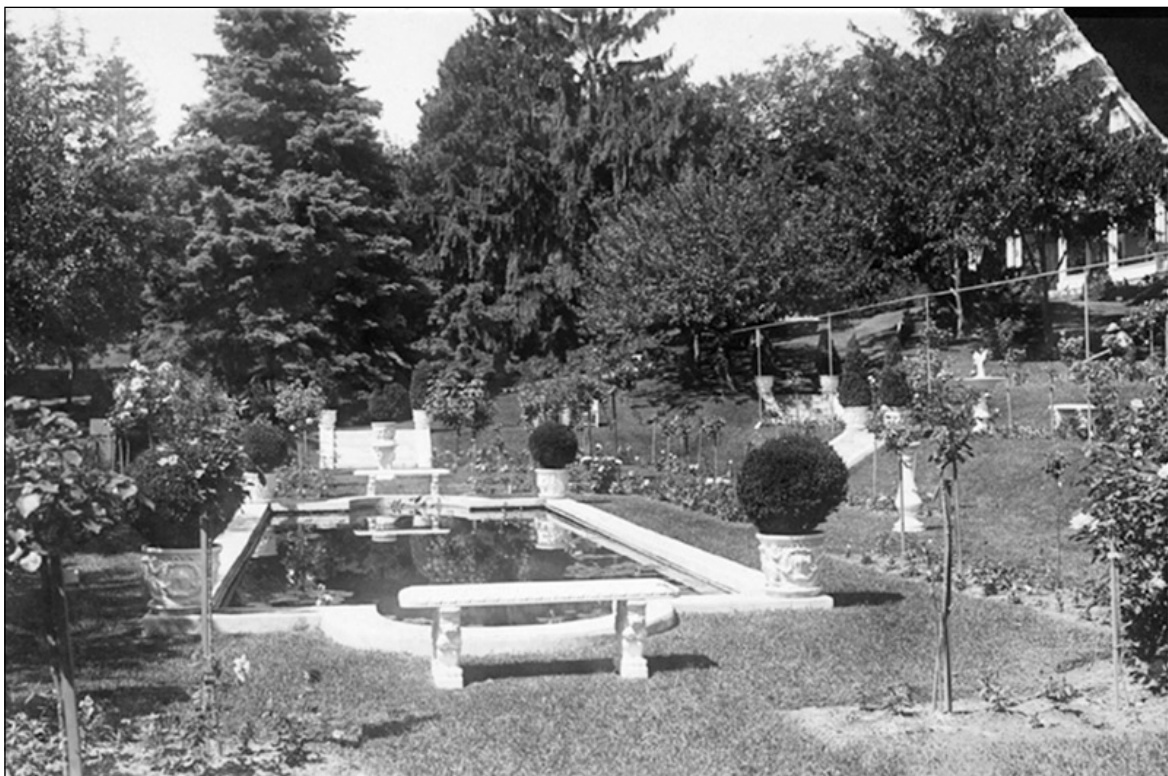


*This large frame house was built by Jonathan Blong during the late 1800s, at his Beechcroft property, and later became the Kent family home. It still stands today on 434 Lakeshore Drive, Port Perry.*





*This 1920s postcard shows the reflecting pool with its water fountains forming an arch over the surface of the pool, which was located in the Kent Estate Rose Garden.*



*The Kent Estate reflecting pool without the fountains about 1921.*





*The Kent Estate home about 1950.*



*The former Kent house as it looks in 2002, at 434 Lakeshore Drive, Port Perry, Ontario.*



