

Summers on the Lake - The Depression Years

When I first met Luella Walker Corbit, some 12 years ago, she was a spry 91 year old, still driving her car to Wegman's and still playing a little golf. I was in the process of performing oral histories for my first book, "Memories of the Heart". The following are some of her memories of life on Canandaigua Lake.

Luella Walker Corbit spent her teenage summers on the Lake at a summer home called the "Hermitage" on Forrester's Point, just north of Black Point between the years of 1925 and 1932. "I grew up in Irondequoit, my husband in Rushville. We both went to the same Southern Tier School as beginning teachers. Jasper, New York." Her husband, Mr. Alton Corbit was to become Superintendent of Schools in Victor. "He really liked that job."

"When I was a youth, my father (Dr. Alexander Walker) bought a cottage on the west side of Canandaigua Lake. My mother and we five children went to the cottage the day after school closed and returned home Labor Day weekend. My father, a doctor, was able to come only on Sundays and he usually brought guests with him, plus our laundry and meat. The cottage was a former men's club of some kind. It was called the "Hermitage". The sign (at the end of the dock) was made from the tops (caps) of bottles, (probably beer bottles) that I suppose they had for the Men's Club. The wooden pier was squarish with benches on either side. The beach was excellent for swimming, deepening gradually."

"The cottage was about 9 miles from the city (of Canandaigua), accessed by a driveway off from Coye Road. West Lake Road in those days was only a dirt road." Since they got to the cottage by car, when Luella was little she was very scared if it had rained recently, "I thought we were going to slide into the lake. I would cover my eyes. We had to go down a steep hill and we could only go half way and then my father had a shack built there to put the car under. Then we went off on the path just to the right of that, down through the woods to the cottage. That was the only cottage there."

The Cottage

"The cottage was large and unfinished inside. There was a large kitchen, a large living space and a huge homemade refrigerator. It took 200 pounds of ice twice a week. It was in a room all by itself with shelves on the opposing side, like a pantry. As I recall (the stove) was like a kerosene stove. Of course, we had kerosene lamps for our lighting. We had no electricity. Upstairs, with a balcony overlooking the kitchen, there

were 4 rooms. The two on the sides had 3 double beds apiece and the center (area) had one small bedroom with no window and one nice sized bedroom with a window on the lakeside. We used lake water (for washing) which we pumped up from the lake, and for drinking water we rowed out some and lowered a jug.

There was a croquet court left of the cottage and a septic tank facility above the cottage."

On Cottage Life:

"I don't remember that we had a 'ring of fire' back then, but I do remember going down and sitting on the pier on July 4th and watching all the people shooting off fireworks around the lake. I think it was later when they had the Ring of Fire."

"We had a big Victrola, from the floor up, it stood. That was our main amusement. We used to play a lot of games like 'Truth or Consequences'. Of course, if you got consequences, they'd send you out anywhere on the property. We always had cousins and friends, ya know. You don't go down just with your family; you always took somebody with you. That made it more fun. It was a great time to grow up." My mother "she would go home every once in a while. And one time she went to Rochester for something or other and my brothers and I decided we were gonna - we know she didn't want us to swim across the lake so we thought we would do it while she was gone. We got my sister to take the row boat and we swam across the lake." They confessed to it "when she got home. She wasn't too mad as long as it turned out all right. We spent most of our day in the water. We swam in the morning, usually before breakfast, then we swam around 10 o'clock and then we went back in the afternoon."

"One of the things that we did for amusement, we would go up a glen, and then somebody would pick us up with a car and bring us back. We went up quite a few glens."

Steamboating

"We'd get on the boat on the dock and go down to Woodville and change to the other boat and go up that side to Canandaigua and get on the other boat and come back. It was a big day's journey. One (of the boats) was the Eastern Star and the other was the Oriana. It stopped at the dock. We had a flag to let the boat know to stop. We drove our mother crazy 'cuss she'd go off, we'd put up the flag and the boat would stop and we weren't going anywhere." When they did take the boat "I don't remember if we took lunch with us, but probably did, I don't know. It was just something to do. To go to Roseland, "we went in the car. They use to have wonderful shows there. I miss Roseland."

On Shopping

"We didn't have a telephone down there, we had a telephone way up the hill and over to West Lake Rd and the Case farm was right there. It was on the West Lake Rd. just up from Miller's Nursery and across from Coye Rd."

Occasionally they went to Brocklebank's grocery store. "I don't know where that was. Somewhere on Main Street in Canandaigua. For groceries and ice we called Brocklebank's from the Case farm and had them delivered by boat. For milk we walked up to the Case farm where we also went for night crawlers for fishing."

Obviously the conversation was lively and memorable. The time just slipped away quickly, and we came away with a warm feeling of having just spent the afternoon in an earlier time period, when life was somehow simpler and more enjoyable. Not only did Luella have a multitude of great memories of her early life, but she was eager to share the stories in a pleasant voice, with soft, gentle laughs interspersed.

Surrounded by her loving family, Luella Corbit died at home on July 17, 2012 at the age of 97. She was survived by her four children, 12 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren. And she leaves us with her happy childhood stories.

by Ray Henry, Town of Canandaigua Historian
March 26, 2015