

BRUCE BEACH HISTORY – 2012

The McCosh Family

Whyte's 1986 *A Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants to Canada before Confederation* records the McCoshes coming from Ayrshire, Scotland where William McCosh married Elizabeth Strathom who gave birth to Alexander, on August 29, 1806. Alexander's first wife was Elizabeth Gemmel and they had five children. Their first was William and their second was our Robert W. McCosh Sr., born Feb. 19, 1832. Their last child, Alexander "Sandy" G. was born in 1839 and that same year, his mother died. Still in Scotland, Alexander Sr. remarried Margaret Brown. Alexander Sr. was a Justice of the Peace in Scotland and William was a miner.

Alexander, his children, Margaret and her three children all immigrated to Canada in 1853. After a brief stay in Toronto and Ayr, they settled in Huron. According to *Jane Fyfe Yemen's Scrapbook*, in 1853 "Mr. McCosh his two sons and our father had walked from Ayr to Pine River and secured their land. Mr. Robert McCosh, so well-known and well thought of by Bruce Beach people, is that Mr. McCosh's son who now [in 1854] came with his oxen and sleigh" to pick up the Yemen family who had travelled to Pine River from Goderich in a sailing vessel (p. 174). Yemen also noted that the men often walked from Pine River to Goderich to procure provisions.

According to an undated newspaper clipping in the Ripley Library, "Huron was a wilderness when Wm. McCosh settled on lots 33 and 34 Huron. Ripley could boast of having one log house at that time (1853). He cut wood in the winter and went about 100 miles south [to] the township of Dumfries to work in harvest, it took him 3 days to walk the distance." Apparently McCoshes were great walkers and they were able to purchase oxen and a wagon at Ayr in 1854 to move to Huron where they acquired much land. Land title records show that by 1889, the McCosh family owned much or all of lots 31 to 34 inclusive.

The first McCosh house was a frame structure built by themselves. In *Families & Farms of Huron*, Gladys McCosh Arnold wrote "The men were carpenters and brought their tools and built a frame house – never lived in a log shanty (p. 15)." This first house was west of Highway 21, north of the 6th Concession, just before the bridge over Pine River and on the west side of the river. In addition to clearing land, building their house and farming, Alexander was elected President of the newly formed Huron Township Agricultural Society in 1866.

Robert W.'s first house was built on the flats near the clubhouse where the southern tennis court is now. Their pump and water trough, used by the first Bruce Beachers, still stands. In 1915, he built the red brick house on top of the hill near the golf course fourth tee. Robert W. was very successful at raising and selling fine cattle. He and his family erected large barns, one of which still stands.

On Valentine's Day in 1862, Robert W. married Ann Turnbull of Ayr and they had seven children. The oldest was Alexander D who farmed lot 31. The second was Mary Ellen who took over the running of the household at age 12 when her mother died in 1876. Her aunt, Mrs. Wm. McCosh, came by each week to help with washing and baking bread (*Families & Farms*, p. 16). The third child was John, known as Jack, and the fourth was Elizabeth, known as Lizzie, followed by Janet who died unmarried at age 22, and then Agnes. Agnes married in 1884 and had three children. She returned to the McCosh farm when her husband died in 1911 but presumably moved out again by 1926 when she remarried. The youngest child was Robert Thomas, known as Bob. Bob was 13 months old when their mother died and Lizzie, who was 8, went to live with the Wm. McCosh family who raised her.

The last McCoshes to live in the red brick farm house were Robert W., Jack, Lizzie and Bob. These three unmarried siblings and their father were great friends to Beachers. "During the time of their annual holiday upon the Beach, these campers were visited almost every day by Mr. Robert McCosh, Sr., whose farm fronted on the lake, and who jokingly called them 'The White Indians'. Mr. McCosh was a man with a fine sense of humour and his daily visit was eagerly looked for by his camping friends" (*Souvenir History of Bruce Beach*, p. 7). In addition to welcoming the first Beachers and letting them use his well, his flats were used for evening church services and the annual concerts until 1918 (pp. 8, 14, and 56). As well, two holes of the first golf course (p. 20) and our first tennis court were on his property (pp. 20, 24).

Robert W.'s son, Bob T., continued in his father's footsteps. The Dobson's (#4) hired Jack and Bob in 1910 to sink a 30 to 40 foot steel pipe for water. In 1913, Bob was paid \$1.50 for work on the golf course and \$2.00 for use of his flats (p. 29). More significantly, in 1925 Bob sold his "property between the road and the lakefront, comprising some 40 acres, for \$3000 for golf purposes [to David E. Kennedy (#1A) and Gerald A. Wilson (#2A)]. Mr. McCosh expressed a desire that the cottagers behind his property should be owners of the property sold" (p. 32). This occurred in 1926 when the cottagers established McCosh Grove, Limited. Thus the McCoshes were crucial to the beginnings of Bruce Beach, to our golf and tennis clubs, and to the formation of McCosh Grove.

Friendly relations continued after the sale. The McCoshes had a right of way over the road to the lake, use of the well, orchard fruit, pasture land, and fallen timber in return for cutting the hay and grass each year to June 1st (p. 94). In 1927, Alex was "engaged as caretaker of the grounds". (p.97). The 1930 McCosh Grove, Limited minutes record that Bob was authorized to eject people playing golf on Sunday or otherwise misbehaving. In addition, the McCoshes sold wood, kerosene, and food, particularly milk, butter and eggs but also other produce to Beachers. Jack rented out his horse and buggy so cottagers could go shopping or pick up people from the train in Ripley or Kincardine. Ian MacEachern (#32) recalled that Bob lent the Bruce Beach Association \$300 which was used to publish Bradley's *Souvenir History of Bruce Beach*. Beyond these financial interactions, cottagers went to the McCosh farm for their mail prior to delivery along the beach, which began in 1937, for furniture deliveries, to pick up and leave cottage keys and just to visit.

In *A History of Bruce Beach*, the daily trip for milk and other supplies and the friendly welcome from Lizzie and her brothers were mentioned by several people. She would let children try to crank the cream separator and taste the cream and the milk. She would take us to collect eggs or to see piglets and calves or watch the milking. Barb Metherell (#1A) remembered the McCosh's allowed children to play in the hay lofts, ride the wagons, and pick rhubarb. Florence Roulston (#45) recalled that her father kept his horse in their pasture. Mildred Parker wrote about going fishing in Pine River at the old McCosh farm. Tom Walsh (#159), a grandson of Robert McCosh Sr., remembered helping to make the "greens" for the first golf holes, cutting the grass, providing wood and straw for mattress to the first campers, and helping to build the first tennis courts. Marjorie Dobson's comment "since the beginning the McCosh family always extended a helping hand to the cottagers" (p. 55) echoes Andrew Wilson's (#7A), who wrote: "Robert McCosh Sr. was the true 'Godfather' of Bruce Beach and his mantle was inherited by his son Bob who, together with Jack and Lizzie, carried on as the patrons of Bruce Beach. ... Bob epitomized the friendly concern and generous attitude by patiently introducing small children to the wonders of farm life..." (p. 40). These glimpses into farming by such nice people were a huge asset to our holidays. Even as Bob and Lizzie aged, they continued to invite visitors in for a cup of tea and biscuits. This family was ever kind to Beachers.

Frances L. Stewart,
Bruce Beach Historian