

BRUCE BEACH HISTORY – 2013

The Cameron Family

The first Cameron settlers in the Bruce Beach region were Hugh and his wife Ann McArthur. According to his tombstone in the Kincardine Cemetery, Hugh was born in Argyllshire, Scotland, in 1815. I could not find records of when they came to Canada nor when they married. However, the 1861 census shows their third child was born in Scotland in 1846 whereas their fourth was born in Canada in 1848. Land records show that the Crown granted Hugh the eastern halves of Lots 39 and 40 on July 6, 1868. However, a table in Robertson's 1906 *The History of the County of Bruce* lists Hugh Cameron on Lot 39 with a "Date of Settlement" of Sept., 1850 and "Clearings" of 10 acres. No buildings are recorded and Lots 40-42 were vacant. The 1852 Census describes Hugh as a Presbyterian farmer and boat builder.

Unlike most settlers who stayed close to the lake, Hugh Sr. and Annie farmed the eastern halves of Lots 39 and 40 first. An 1880 county map shows only one building on the eastern half of Lot 40, close to the North Branch of Pine River. Land transfer records reveal that the western halves of Lots 39 and 40 only became Cameron property in 1899 (Lot 40) and 1923 (Lot 39). Apparently, Hugh Sr. and Annie, like Alexander and Margaret McCosh, valued being inland and close to Pine River more than being on the lakeshore, possibly because it was easier to get the children to school from there.

Hugh Sr. and Annie had many children: John (1841), Margaret (1843), Isabella (1846), Alexander (1848), James (1852), Hugh (1855), Jessie (1857), Mary (1860), and William John (1862). Hugh Sr. died (August 4, 1887) at age 73 after being thrown out of a wagon. The attending physician was Kincardine's famous Dr. Secord. Hugh's great granddaughter, Isabel Cameron McConnell, wrote in *Families and Farms of Huron with its Hub Ripley*: "In 1890 the youngest son, William John ... took over the family farm" and then in turn, in 1919, their son "William Hugh ...took over the farm".

Of greater importance was Hugh Sr.'s acquisition of lots slightly further north because it is from these that land was sold to Bruce Beachers. Hugh Sr. bought the 103 acres of Lot 45 for \$500 in 1874 and Lot 46 was granted to him by the Crown that year too. Ten years later, 100 acres of Lot 45 went to his son James and 100 acres of Lot 46 went to his son Alex with the stipulation that both sons give Hugh Sr. and Annie \$50 a month for life. James sold Lot 45 in 1896, but his son, Hugh M., bought it back in 1920.

Hugh M. married his neighbour Mabel Emmerton, and interestingly, in 1946 they sold part of Lot 45 to the Director of the Veteran's Land Act for \$4800 and then bought it back for only \$1.00. A newspaper article on their 60th wedding anniversary in 1976 states "The couple farmed

lots 45 and 46, Concession A, Huron Township until 1945 when their son Mervin took over the operation” and that Hugh M. “was an assessor, a building inspector and also issued building permits in Huron Township after he had finished farming”. Mervin owned Lot 45 from Dec. 1950 until 1957.

Lot 46 passed between brothers Alex and James several times. In 1918, Alex transferred the northern half to his son, Hugh Alex and this half went out of Cameron hands when Hugh Alex sold it in 1925. But Hugh M. still held part of the southern half of the lot and significantly for us, in 1947, he and Mabel sold the lakeshore portions of Lots 45 and 46 to the Cameron Syndicate. This land became Cameron Grove, behind cottages 121 to 136.

There are some interesting facts about other Cameron properties. First, Lot 47 was farmed by a French settler before the Crown granted it to a *woman* (Joanna Berthune) in 1877. She and her husband sold it to John Gentles who, *less than a month later*, sold it to Hugh Sr. like Lot 46, Alex got Lot 47 from his father and later turned it over to his son Hugh Alex who sold it in 1925. Second, much of Lot 48 was acquired by James in 1912 and 1924. In 1941, Hugh M., as executor for his father James, acquired this land for only \$1.00. Third, *in the 1950s*, Hugh M. and Mabel sold part for a road allowance and building lots along the western side of the road. Finally, Hugh M. acquired Lot 57 where the Aintree Trailer Camp is now but he held this lot for four years only, selling it in 1920.

The land from Lots 45 and 46 severed for Cameron Grove was officially transferred on August 7, 1947. There were several reasons for purchasing this property. An important one was access to the cottages. In 1943, the road from the south came only to cottage 117 and from the north, there was only a path from the 10th Concession. According to Ruth Wright (cottage #136) and Marion Dyer Bond (formerly #113), Hugh M. had a cattle path to the lake and cottagers used it to go to the Cameron farm for milk and eggs and to get phone messages. But Hugh M. charged each family that assessed their cottage through his land. Secondly, Barry McPherson (#122) recalled that talk in 1941 of a road going through from the 8th to the 10th raised concerns that another row of cottages might be built along it or even worse, a Wasaga Beach situation could develop. Road dust and greater public access throughout the year were also concerns.

Another precondition supporting purchase was the local playground and tennis courts which had existed since the 1920s. According to Gordon Lane (#130), for about 20 years prior to the formation of Cameron Grove, the land these occupied was leased from Hugh M. Buying this land would ensure continuation of these sport facilities and eliminate the yearly rental costs. Finally, Hugh M. was getting out of farming at this time so his traditional arrangements with the cottagers might change.

These preconditions resulted in an Articles of Agreement between Hugh M. Cameron and the Cameron Syndicate in August of 1944. The five members of the Cameron Syndicate were: William M. MacKay (#124), James A. Hay (#127), Andrew. Lane (#130), E. William Jewitt (#133), and J. T. Thomas (#136). What they agreed to purchase was “the West Part of the Lot Number Forty-five and the South half of Lot Number Forty-six ... being situated below the hill, consisting of five acres of land ... more or less including the Sport Field”. The total cost was \$850, \$550 being paid with the signing of the agreement. When the final payment was made three years later, including interest at three percent, the land title document of August 7, 1947 records the transfer of the land to the Cameron Syndicate with a right of way allowance for Hugh’s son Mervin and his heirs to allow access to Lake Huron. Thanks to Gordon Lane copies of both these documents have been added to our archives.

In 1952, Cameron Grove was established as an undeveloped green belt and on August 17, 2009, it was incorporated as the Cameron Grove Cottagers Association. By-Law 1 lists the purposes of this association. These are to protect the undeveloped land, serving as stewards of the forest and greenbelt for future generations and to advance the cultural, recreational and social interests and activities of the owners, in part by owning facilities (2 tennis courts, a softball field and a picnic meeting area) for the members and their visitors but also for others along Bruce Beach. Another purpose is to continue the system of private lanes and roadways for members and their guests. Finally, membership in Cameron Grove goes with the cottage not the individuals occupying it. Thus, the formation of Cameron Grove with its protectionist environmental practices and its social purposes has not only benefitted those people in cottages 121 to 136 and Division 4 but also the Bruce Beach community as whole.

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