

Do You Have A Story To Tell?

We challenge all cottagers on Lake Manitou to write their stories of their life on Lake Manitou. It would be wonderful to think of all of your accumulated stories and histories becoming a collection worth publishing!

The Littlefield Cabin

Let me tell you about the Littlefield cabin on Newby's Bay. We never thought of it as a "cottage" – more of a camp – a fisherman's camp. My father, Edgar Littlefield, had always loved fishing. He often ventured from his home in Columbus, Ohio, north to the Michigan lakes. It wasn't long before he learned about Manitoulin Island. I remember the log cottage we first rented at Roy Spry's Camp, its wood cooking stove in particular, and the ice boxes, which were literally that: an insulated box for keeping food, with a section to hold a huge chunk of ice. Spry showed us the pit filled with sawdust where he stored the blocks of ice cut from the lake in winter. Of course this fascinated me (age 14 at the time). After these visits to the island in the early 50s, Edgar decided to purchase lake frontage from George Spry on Newby's Bay. This was accomplished in 1954. Our piece of lakefront was (and is) 200 feet, and goes back 166 feet from the lake's "high water mark." Our cabin was built by George Spry.

Edgar was usually not one to keep a daily journal, but he did exactly that during the summer of 1960, beginning with the day he left home in Worthington, Ohio. This was the summer he built a bathhouse. Well, we called it "the temple" because it had a front overhang and two pillars. We still call it "the temple." Major and George Newby, along with Horace Moore, did much of the foundation work and basic structure. Ollie Bond was contracted to do the plumbing and Jim Henderson, the electric. Trips into town were frequent, for food and building supplies. Gus Hare took care of car problems, and visits to Dr. McQuay were made necessary because of my dad's heart problems which, by then, had come up. One day on an errand to Little Current they met the Oxenreiders from Wooster, Ohio. It turned out that they owned "Lacodia Lodge." Guy Oxenreider claimed to know how to catch bass --- knowledge my dad hoped he would share.

Edgar and Charlotte (his second wife and my step-mom) were nature lovers. Edgar had expressed an interest in climbing up to the top of the limestone ridge north of the cabin, but abandoned the idea when he could find no one to guide him. We now know it as Cup and Saucer. They were also avid birders, and would stop anywhere to search for a particular bird, or follow someone's lead, such as the swallows at the Cox farm. They would do almost anything to add a new bird to the list and often did. While in Kagawong to do boat business with Oliver Berry, they ventured into a swamp leading to the river (one of their favorite birding places) and heard and saw a black-billed cuckoo, new for the bird list which was already quite long. Berry himself had an intense interest in wildflowers and complained that no published guide was available to him, and that he'd pay \$100 for one.

Evenings were often filled with bridge and cribbage, played with visitors and whoever else, including the Anglins. Fishing resulted in catches of sizeable Perch, Black bass (up to 13"), and Pike. Bass

“hot spots” were located and exploited. One was near the Oxenreider’s, another at “Uncle Jim’s Boathouse,” and another dubbed “Al’s spot.”

Visitors to the cabin included my older sister, Nancy, her husband, and baby, Susan, the first grandchild. (Susan and my son, Tom, are now owner-caretakers of the camp and property.) The Bennetts, Frank and Catherine from Columbus, also visited. The Bennetts eventually had a place across the bay from us.

Reading the journal accounts, it is obvious that the days were filled with lots of birding, fishing, running errands, playing bridge or cribbage, and just doing what was needed to maintain the place. My Dad’s journal gives so much detail that cannot be covered here: fantastic local reports of lake monsters, the Manitoulin family names that became so familiar to me in my teens (Wagg, Beck, Williamson, McQuay to mention some), and local lore. Yet, even after over 60 years, it is a reality that we know Manitoulin only as a summertime place, as part of the summertime influx of visitors. We are not privy to the day-to-day social life, the trials and tribulations of its people, or to wintertime life and sports. The weekly Manitoulin Expositor keeps us informed to some extent. But still, we wouldn’t dream of letting go of our special little spot on Newby’s Bay.

Jane Littlefield Harding
Reston, Virginia

[Much of the above information is taken from “*A Place in the Woods*”, a journal by Edgar Littlefield written in 1960, revised and edited by Susan Aluzri, 2001, with her permission.]

Here are a few pictures that help tell Jane’s story of their cabin.



← Car & Trailer loaded. Ready to take the Littlefield family on the Norisle to the Manitoulin.



← The back of the Littlefield cabin with the “Temple” bathhouse to the left through the trees.



← Jane’s son David. The old Lucar house in the background.



← Oliver & Clara Berry with Ed and his new boat from Kagawong.