

# Canada North Lodge History



## 57th Anniversary 1947 - 2004 The Hoffman's 27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

### It all started like this . . . 57 years ago . . . in the Fall of 1946

Since before WWII, the abundance of game and the beauty of the countryside had drawn men northwards from the United States into northwestern Ontario. A few tourist resorts were situated around Kenora and along the Trans-Canada Highway. Yet no one had penetrated the wilderness of Lac Seul Lake or the lakes and rivers north of Ear Falls. In the fall of 1946 Claude Towne, an American citizen who had operated a resort at Nestor Falls, came up Lac Seul in a fishing boat powered by a 10 hp Johnson outboard motor. He intended to build a resort on a good trout lake where the walleye and northern pike fishing was equally good. The countryside was beautiful, but wherever he went trout fishing was poor or non-existent. Somewhere in the vast area of virgin territory was an ideal location for his camp. He went back to Nestor Falls and convinced one of his guides, Jim Sweet, to join in partnership with him on the project. Jim and his two brothers set out for Lac Seul, carrying camping equipment, a cook stove, a goodly supply of food and sufficient eight foot poles, pipped down the center and edged, to build two cabins. It was early December in 1946 when they crossed Lac Seul. Winter was approaching with blustery winds and snow. When they reached Goldpines (Ear Falls) they were undecided which direction to travel further. Inquiries from local residents indicated that the lakes on the Woman River system were better for trout than those on the Chukuni River.

Jim Sweet decided to take the Uchi Lake Road and build on a trout lake closest to the road. The road was in poor shape, he acquired a tractor 7 sleigh, a driver, and a guide. It would be a long journey, in fact, it took them thirty six hours. They arrived at the shores of Little Bear Lake at six o'clock in the morning. Its shores were less than a quarter of a mile from the Uchi Lake Road and it was an area where trout, walleye and northern pike abounded. Jim Sweet decided that his site was as good as any to build the camp to be known as Canada North Lodge. They pitched a tent and started clearing the bush to erect at least two cabins before spring. During January 1947 Jim and his party had completed two cabins, cut lumber and roughed in two more, built an ice house and filled it with forty tons of ice, all cut by hand using a windlash and winch, before they ran out of food. Jim returned to Goldpines and from his experience it was evident that a tractor was a necessity at Canada North Lodge. He purchased a John Deere Model H - having it delivered from Kenora to Goldpines. After a lot of delays to bad roads, bad weather, the spring thaw, and other unfortunate incidents they finally completed their 30 mile trip back to Canada North Lodge.

As soon as fishing season opened in the spring of 1947, tourists started arriving at Canada North Lodge. They flew in from Kenora with Parsons Airways or the Ontario Central Airlines. Fishing was sensational. They caught their limit in fish of all kinds. It was a sportsman's paradise.

Excerpts & documentation taken from: Yesterday the River, by Rae Kiebusinski, published by the township of Ear Falls History Committee - Ear Falls, Ontario. Some changes made to shorten written form. Yesterday the River is available from Ear Falls Municipal Building, Ear Falls, Ontario.

### Canada North Lodge 1947 - 2004

#### A tribute to the past owners of Canada North Lodge

- James Sweet 1947-1950 (3 years)
- Grace Reirsch 1950-1956 (6 years)
- Grace Blackburn 1956-1963 (7 years)
- Roy Garfield 1963-1964 (1 year)
- Warren Prummer 1964-1965 (1 year)
- Wally Twigg 1965-1976 (11 years)
- Rod Holten 1976-1978 (2 years)
- Mike & Julie Hoffman 1978 to 2004 (27 years)

As they often say, wonderful occasions only happen a few times in ones lifetime, and the 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of Canada North Lodge is one of those times. It is with pride that Julie and I were the owners of the lodge on this important date in it's history.

**From (1947): 4 cabins & a few boats & motors**  
**To (2004): A Fully Modern American Plan Lodge**

Canada North Lodge was accessible only by air prior to 1970. During 1970 a new road from Ear Falls to the South Bay Mine opened, Canada North Lodge was now accessible by road.. The road made it possible to acquire supplies and materials cheaply and easily, & our guests would now have direct access to the lodge. The days of depending upon aircraft were at an end.

I still remember the old dock that was built on pilings that floated when the water was high. In the spring, only a few persons at a time on the dock or you would go swimming. I remember the old ice house where tons of ice were stored that had been hand cut from the lake prior to spring and covered with sawdust to

prevent its thawing over the summer months. Electric ice machines had not arrived.

Wally Twigg built a new lodge after he purchased Canada North Lodge. It was beautifully rustic and built solely out of logs. The only problem was the ground it sat on, all marshy lowland that caused a lot of grief each spring due to frost heaves and shifting. This lodge was destroyed in the tornado of 1987 and about broke our hearts to see it go..

When Julie & I purchased the lodge we were determined to make it one of the finest in Ontario. We realized this would require lots of time, money and work. Our goal was to have the best in accommodations, equipment, & service, an accommodation that would appeal to everyone including - corporations, couples, families, large or small groups. A lodge where everyone, including the wives & gals, could come without having to rough it.

At the time we purchased the lodge it had 11 units. These units had occupancy of 2, 4, 6 & 8 persons, with a total occupancy of between 22 and 30. We had a total of 13 boats at the main lodge. Our generator system consisted of one 16 KW and one 10KW unit. The cabins were heated with fuel oil stoves, had hot & cold water, flush stools, and a shower in each. The floors were either tile or linoleum. Our total staff consisted of about 10 employees.

Over the years we completely remodeled all the cabins, inside and out., and inter-connected all the cabins with each other and the lodge with an extensive board walk. We built a new lodge w/game room and conference room, 16 new guest units, a large new floating dock, additional staff quarters, & a new lakeside workshop & fish house. All of our equipment, including our boats and motors, generators, kitchen equipment, dining room furniture, ice machines, minnow tanks, etc. were updated with new equipment. Extensive

landscaping to the lodge grounds have opened the camp with fewer trees and a lot's of lawn.

Today we have 24 units with a occupancy of 2 - 4 persons and a total occupancy of between 48 and 60 persons. We have a total of 28 boats at the main lodge, Our generator system consists of one 60 KW and one 85KW unit. The cabins have electric heat, wall to wall carpeting, modern baths with tub/shower combinations. Our staff has grown to about 25 employee's.

The dreams that started 50 years ago have produced an 4-Star American Plan facility, offering the finest in accommodations, meals, boats, motors, guides, daily maid service, portage trips, & daily fly out fishing trips. 40% of our guests are couples and families, we accommodate many corporate groups and bus trips, while the backbone is still smaller groups of between two and four to a party. Yes, there have been many changes over the 50 years, all for the better. Who knows what the future will bring, but you can bet there will be many more exciting changes to come.

And most important, our fishing on the Woman River Chain of Lakes has remained good. Yes, I am sure that it is not as good as it was in 1947, but I can say that the fishing has remained fairly constant since my first trip to Canada North Lodge. We have our good years and fair years, good weeks and bad weeks, but that's fishing wherever you go. That's why we call it fishing not getting. It is with pride that I can look anyone in the eye and honestly tell them the fishing is good. We have dedicated a lot of effort to our conservation policies, and thanks to our guests cooperation, these policies are having a big impact upon making the fishing better. The future of fishing at Canada North Lodge can only become better as we all continue to do our part.

### **Our Years At Canada North Lodge**

Many have asked, Mike, how did you find & end up purchasing Canada North Lodge. My only answer was that it must have been destiny. As an avid fisherman who had grown up with the love of fishing and one who had fished many of the hot-spots in the US, I realized that I had a burning desire to fish where the fishing was said to be the finest, Canada. So in the early 1970's myself and a group of 4 others, booked a 4 day trip to a place in Ontario known as Birch Lake Lodge for the opening of walleye season. After months of anticipated waiting the date drew near and all our plans where laid, when a day or two before, the phone rang with bad news from Birch Lake Lodge. The ICE was not out and they had to cancel our trip, , , oh!!! just great , , , but they thought the ice was out at Canada North Lodge and they would give them a call and see if they had any openings. As it turned out Wally Twigg, owner of Canada North Lodge did call us back and we booked with him for the same dates. We had a great time and booked with him a couple of more years, while talking about buying Canada North Lodge. Little did we know that Wally Twigg was to sell. In the spring of 1976 we arrived to be greeted by a new owner, Rod Holten. You cannot imagine the disappointment in my face to know that the lodge of my dream had been sold and I had no idea that it was up for sale. But as fate would have it, Rod was not really happy with the lodge business and directly after I arrived home he was on the phone asking if I would be interested. After yes and no'ing myself to death for a year, I finally made a decision. In the spring of 1978 we finalized an agreement with Rod to purchase the lodge. Tell me destiny does not exist? The word **ICE** changed my whole life.

The dedication & cooperation of my family played an important part in our being able to effectively operate Canada North Lodge for so many years. It was a big change in all their lives. When Julie and I purchased CNL, Pat was 12, Cathy 10, and Tim was 8. They became accustomed to getting out of school early in the spring and entering school a bit late in the fall. They had to learn to keep up their schoolwork on both ends, moving in spring and fall, and I am sure as they became teenagers they often asked why they had to leave their friends behind for the summer. They worked hard and appreciated their summers in Canada. They still talk about their fun and adventures while growing up at Canada North Lodge and attribute the lodge as helping them become the fine adults they are today. We are very proud of them.

Pat is employed by Perfection Equipment as a computer programmer and living in Oklahoma City, OK. He loves his work but to date is still unmarried. Says he is looking for the perfect one

Cathy has been in the Air Force for over six years and is currently stationed at Minot AFB, ND. In 1991 she married Randy Hickam and they have presented us with two wonderful grandchildren, Jennell 5, and Sean 3.

Tim, graduated from Southern Illinois University as an Electrical Engineer, and is living in the Minneapolis area while employed by Square D. In 1995 he married Cindy Bradford, at this date no children, we are still waiting for more grandchildren.

As far as Julie and I are concerned, it has been quite an adventure and experience. We can honestly say, we have never had time to be bored. We have had our good times and bad times, but overall there are no regrets. We still have a hard time deciding where we actually live & never have become used to going through the emotional effects of leaving and arriving at both locations. We have been privileged to be able to meet so many wonderful people in this business & have made so many friends both in Canada and the US. Our years at the lodge have been blessed with good health, and a lot of good luck in being able to get everything accomplished that we set out to do almost 20 years ago.

### **A Tribute to the Staff of Canada North Lodge**

Lastly, we do not want to forget the wonderful staff that we have had for the 27 years we have owned Canada North Lodge. Their dedication to their job, friendly attitudes, hard work, and companionship has been a big part of our success story. They are unique in the fact that they are on the job for 24hrs a day, for months on end. It is not just a matter of going to work and coming home. They live, work, and have fun together, getting along with each other is a must. Our hats are off to them. Thank You Staff for your help in making Canada North Lodge what it is today. We often get requests from our past guests about the staff, if you remember their name, we will try and pass on their address to you.

### **A Thank You to Our Suppliers & Local Merchants**

A very important part of running any resort is the cooperation and service we receive from our suppliers and merchants. We depend upon them for our food, boat & motors, gasoline, camp supplies, & building supplies. Receiving them in a timely manner is critical. After our unfortunate tornado in the spring of 1987, their full cooperation and immediate help made it possible for us to continue running the lodge, we will never forget all those who diligently helped in putting it all back together.

Thank You very much..