

# A guided tour of Hindon history

by Susan Wilson

In the Municipality of Anson, Hindon, and Minden, Hindon Township is the forgotten partner. So this is a story you might find easier to follow with a county map at your elbow. There it is—directly north of Anson, running up the west side of the old Bobcaygeon Road opposite Stanhope on the east side.

Only 15 years ago, before Highway 118 was put through, you couldn't get there from Carnarvon without driving all the way down Highway 35 to the Scotch Line Road, over to the Bobcaygeon Road, and then north again. And, because at least 80 per cent of Hindon is Crown land, it's comparatively unpopulated.

But that doesn't mean it isn't as rich in history as its better-known counterparts. Much of that history centres around Brady Lake where Morley Kent has been a cottager since 1950 and a regular visitor for a long time before that.

The Kents have a long history in the Minden area—his great-great-aunt Mary Kent is said to have been the first white baby born in Minden—and they seem to have inter-married with just about every other long-established family over the decades.

"And that's how the Kents came to Brady Lake," says Morley, as he enjoys a tranquil Saturday morning on his cottage porch. "One of the Kents married an Austin, a family with a farm and a sawmill at the head of the lake. Another Kent married a Crawford and that family also had a farm, but at the other end of the lake. The Kents' first farm was on the Bobcaygeon Road closer to Minden. Later on, they let the farm go back to the government, really just walked away from it, and took another grant of land up on Kushog Lake. Anyway, my father, Allan Kent, would come to the Brady Lake area to visit his relatives. It was a big family too—he was one of 11 children.



**Morley Kent's mother attended S.S. No. 9 Stanhope, the little red school house at Hindon Hill. In those days, the school year lasted from the first of April until a week before Christmas, with two weeks off in the hottest part of the summer. The community had a post office but no church. So services were held in the school on Wednesday evenings.**

"On the other side, my mother was Mabel Toye. That was another big family—she was the oldest of 14. Her family had a farm at the corner of Highway 118 and the Brady Lake Road, as they're called now. She talks about coming in to visit the Austins as a child."

So it seems inevitable that Allan and Mabel would meet. In 1926, Mabel's parents also "walked away" from the

family farm in return for a grant of land in Sharp Township near Englehart, about halfway between New Liskeard and Kirkland Lake. "In those days, when the government was trying to open up the area, it wasn't called Northern Ontario," Kent recalls, "it was called New Ontario. My father went up there for a while with his in-laws to see what it would be like, leaving my mother and sister behind. But when he came back, he said the winters

Highway 118, or Highway 35 from Pine Springs to Dorset. In places it exists only in scraps: a street name in Kinmount, the road from the bridge in Minden to Highway 118. And one long stretch has disappeared altogether.

"Exactly ten miles (16 kilometres) north of Minden," says Kent, "where the Brady Lake Road makes a 90-degree turn to the west, you can see a rough track heading straight up the hill and into the woods. That was where the Bobcaygeon Road went, in the days before this part was called the Brady Lake Road, and that spot was called 'Ten Hill' because it was ten miles from town. Back a little farther towards Minden, there was Nine Hill which was nine miles from town, and the one before that was called Orange Hill because that was where the Orange Lodge stood."

From that point at old Ten Hill to Pine Springs on Little Girl Bay at the north end of Kushog Lake, the Bobcaygeon Road is no more. "There used to be a hunt camp back in there," Kent recalls, "and the road was passable for a distance on an ATV. But I've tried to walk in there once or twice over the years and you really can't tell where the road was anymore. It's all grown over and obliterated. It's been that way since at least the early 1940's."

The original path of the road down at Highway 118 is also hard to find if you don't know where to look. "Over the years, there have been four versions of the intersection where the Bobcaygeon and Peterson Roads used to meet," says Kent. "We called it The Junction."

The Peterson Road was an east-west route in the network of colonization roads. Finished around 1863, it linked the Madawaska River in the east with the Muskoka River to the west. It has disappeared even more completely than the Bobcaygeon Road, although remnants still snake around Highway 118 in the vicinity of Carnarvon—the first brief

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Morley Kent (right), his wife Dreena, and their younger daughter Karen, with her husband Terry Monette, in front of the family cottage on Brady Lake. Their older daughter Sheila and her family were not up this particular weekend.

his in-laws to see what it would be like, leaving my mother and sister behind. But when he came back, he said the winters were too tough and so they decided to move to Toronto, where he became a licenced mechanic. That's where I was born."

Every other summer, the Kents would come back to Minden for two weeks to visit their relatives. (Alternate summers they went to Englehart.) They stayed at Uncle Fred Wright's place on the Bobcaygeon Road—Uncle Fred was married to May Kent—and always made trips up to see Uncle Sam Crawford at the Brady Lake farm. Those regular trips up and down the Bobcaygeon Road made Morley Kent an expert on the peregrinations of that historic colonization road.

Built between 1856 and 1862 in order to provide a route for land-hungry immigrants into the back country of Peterborough, Victoria, and Haliburton counties, the Bobcaygeon Road originally ran in a (comparatively) straight line from Bobcaygeon to Dorset. But in the last 55 years, the route has suffered a variety of fates and lost most of its integrity.

Nowadays much of it is known under other names: Highways 649 and 121 from Bobcaygeon to Minden, or Brady Lake Road for a few kilometres north of

Bobcaygeon Road, although remnants still snake around Highway 118 in the vicinity of Carnarvon—the first brief east-west stretch of Kushog Lake Road before it turns north, for instance, or the section connecting 118 with Duck Lake Road, and the places marked along the hiking trail in Harrison's Woods. Even in Morley Kent's young days, it went no further west than the Kushog Lake Road. The only way out, as he puts it, was back to Minden.

"There used to be a floating log bridge across the bog at the Junction about a kilometre south of the present Highway 118," Kent recalls, "and it was usually under water, thanks to the beavers. You just pointed your car in the general direction of the other side and hoped for the best. One year, it was so bad they decided to move the road to go around the bog. Then later on they straightened that curve out and moved the whole road north of there to the west. Then they moved the top of the Bobcaygeon Road at the highway to the east so that there is a jog between it and the Brady Lake Road. But at one time, you went straight up."

The psychological, if not the geographical, centre of Hindon Township was the

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# Eight grades all in one-room schoolhouse

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community of Hindon Hill which straddled the road about halfway between the Peterson Road and Ten Hill. There was the Orange Lodge, a post office at the Taylors' farm, and a little, red, one-room school house. Because it was on the Stanhope side of the Bobcaygeon Road, it was known as S. S. No. 9 Stanhope.

Kent's mother went to that school as a child, walking north from the farm throughout the school year which lasted from the first of April to the week before Christmas, with a two-week break in the hottest part of the summer. Eight grades were taught and students had to go to Minden to take their school-leaving exams at the end of their final year. Church services were held in the school on Wednesday evenings. Though rather the worse for wear, the school house and its stable still stand, shielded from the view of passing motorists by a thick growth of trees.

When he was 13, Morley Kent contracted polio and that led his parents to decide that a cottage would be a good idea—and what more natural choice than Brady Lake. "In 1950, they bought 190 feet of shoreline from the Crown and built the cottage with lumber sawn at the Austin's mill up the lake. Dad and I and a lot of friends actually put it up. Later on, we built the garage with boards from the old Johnson saw mill that stood near Uncle Sam's farm. It had been out of operation for a long time and was getting old and dangerous, so he was going to burn it down anyway."

The investment in Morley's health paid off. "The idea was that I could do a lot of swimming to strengthen my legs. And it worked. Every day I'd swim across the lake—about half a mile—and back. It really did help my legs."

When Morley's sister Dorothy married Roger Parsons, the lot was divided, with 90 feet going to Dorothy and 100 feet, including the original cottage, to Morley and his wife Dreena. In 1971, they put on



The garage at the Kents' cottage was built with boards from the old Johnson saw mill on Brady Lake. The walls are covered now with old licence plates collected by their nephew Larry Parsons.

recalls, "Brady Lake Road was a one-lane dirt trail that the township was still grading as if it were being used by horses, with a high crown in the middle. But there weren't any horses anymore and we had to ask them to change their ways. The bottoms of the cars were low in those days, too, and you were always running the risk of losing your oil pan on the rocks that grew in the road. So we made a deal with the township: if we painted the hazardous rocks, they'd come along and blast them out. Now the road is kept plowed in the winter for the school bus. So we have year-round access which is great for our daughters and their families who like to use the cottage as a base for

three-way deal among Ontario Hydro, the newly formed cottagers' association, and a Mr. Branson. Dreena Kent was the secretary of the association for 30 years,

starting in 1960, and she remembers the story well.

"The association decided that we'd like to get electricity in here," she says. "So we approached Ontario Hydro and they suggested we talk to Mr. Branson who had the muskrat farm at Hindon Hill and had put hydro in there at his own expense. The deal was that we had to have so many cottages signed up to pay for the cost of bringing it in. But there weren't that many cottages on the lake back then. So the association had to pay Branson the difference for several years until the numbers grew sufficiently."

When Allan and Mabel Kent first built on Brady Lake in 1950, there were about eight privately owned cottages, plus the ten the Allison's built and rented out, plus the various Austin homes. Now there are about 70 residences around the lake.

And there it will likely stay. As is the case throughout southern Ontario, the Crown land is not for sale. The Township of Hindon will remain unpopulated and Brady Lake—land-locked, spring-fed, its water levels at the whim of the beavers—will remain at the end of the road. As the regrowth of forest matures, the hints of its history through the last century will become more and more obscure. That's why a guide with a good memory, like Morley Kent, is invaluable.

This is the 11th in a series of articles about cottaging on the Lakes of Haliburton County.