

Seymour Histories – Gildersleeve Family

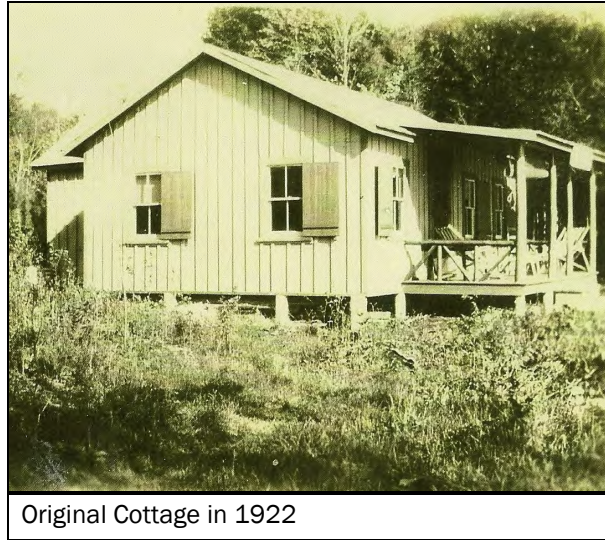
Story by Tracey Shadday, pictures from Gildersleeve Family

Barbara Gildersleeve, along with her three nephews, own one of the oldest cottages on Seymour Lake, a place where five generations have continued to enjoy its pristine water. Her grandfather, Harry Johnson, from Island Pond, came to Seymour to build a fishing camp next to his friend, Herb Danforth who had built a few years earlier. These two camps, both with little change over the years, are today known as “Trails End.” Built in 1922, the camp offered a place to enjoy the outdoors, where family and friends could gather and anglers could perhaps snag a fish or two. Today the legacy continues as Barbara’s children and grandchildren (the 4th- and 5th-generation) make Seymour their annual vacation destination.

For a long time, the camps on Seymour were mostly owned by Vermonters who came to fish its crystal clear water. By 1922 there were only 39 camps on the lake. That number increased as roads improved and by the 1930s there were approximately 50 camps. A list of camp owners printed in the 1931 edition of “Lake Seymour Illustrated and Historicized”, by William Bryant Bullock, lists 40 proprietors by name and town of origin. 32 of those were Vermonters. By 1976 the number of camps swelled to 238.

The family cottage was christened “Camp Naku”—“beautiful water”—by Barbara’s grandmother, Edna. It is located on the lake across from Wolf’s Point, with a panoramic view of Bald Mountain to the south, the sand beach to the north and a full view of the bay to the west. From their vantage point, family members enjoyed watching the changing moods of the lake, especially as storms moved in through the area.

The scene was not always as it is today. Across the lake, Barbara remembers the tall letters spelling “Ames Park”, placed on a ridge on Mt. Elan and reminiscent of the famous



Original Cottage in 1922



1922 Edna, Helen and supper guests at the original cottage

Landmark sign overlooking Hollywood. The sign marked the area that is now off Camp Winape Road, a section where Harley Ames developed homes.

During the 1940s and 50s her grandparents would spend the summer at the lake, and Barbara’s family would join them in August. Once they arrived, there were no trips to nearby towns, and socializing with other lake visitors was limited. Gas was rationed back then, and no one really wanted to leave the cozy sanctuary! Outings included once-per-summer canoe trips to Lafoe’s, a store and gas station which had been a landmark in Morgan Center since the 1920s. Barbara and her sister bought 5-cent candy bars—their only sweet treats. Swimming across the lake to Wolf’s Point became a rite of passage.

There were no loons on the lake to fill the night time hours with their plaintive calls nor ducks to come visiting. It was a time without kayaks; sailboats were rare, and even the motorboats were few in number. Occasionally, a canoe would pass by, but mostly it was just rowboats, usually with fishermen at the oars. In those early years before electricity, food was stored in a wooden box buried in the ground and kept cold with ice from the

icehouse at Lafoes. Without indoor plumbing, water was drawn from the lake by a hand pump and a nearby spring provided drinking water. An outhouse was located some distance from the house. Inside the cabin there were gas chandeliers for lights and a large wood-burning kitchen stove for cooking and heating water. In the

1940s, the cottage was expanded. An eating porch was added to the kitchen, and the open front porch facing the lake was enclosed as a glass porch. (Continued on the next page) Reminders of loved ones who have since passed away re-



1922 Helen & mother Edna



1938 Harry with Seymour catch

Gildersleeves, continued

main. The Old Town canoe in which Barbara's parents courted still hangs in the shed. A stuffed lake trout caught by her grandmother and a stuffed fawn with antlers added by her grandmother's father adorn the living room wall. The Civil War gun carried by her grandfather's father, Elhanan Johnson, from Island Pond, also hung on the wall.

In fact, the Johnson family traces its Vermont roots back to the 1780s when Obed Johnson moved from Massachusetts to Guildhall Vermont, and later to Newark. The decorations add character and awaken wonderful memories of times shared on the lake with family.



1930s Harry & Edna getting ready for golf

Each subsequent generation has made its own mark on the cabin by adding some curiosity

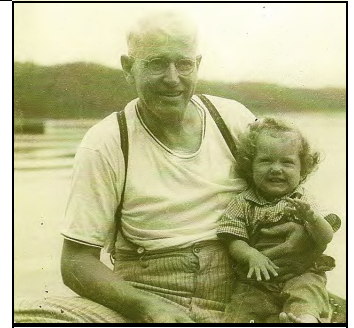


Barbara and her father Ken circa. 1942

to a wall or room.

Times are changing, but each summer generations of the family are drawn back to their lake retreat. Life slows down and returns to its traditional Vermont pace. There is no TV, Internet or phone—distractions that could interfere with the solace they find in this very special place.

There remains one lingering question in Barbara's mind—are there any other families who have had five or more generations enjoying the lake in their original camp?□



Barbara and grandfather Harry circa. 1941



The house in summer 2012