

A Family History on the Big Rideau

By Margot Grant Kyle

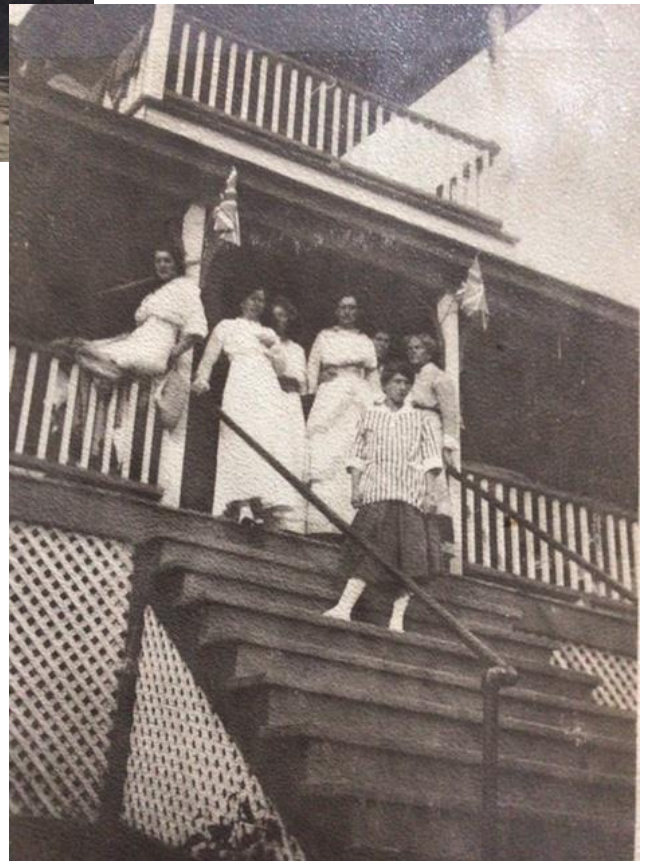
In the very early 1900's, my grandfather, Hugh Carson, was the first in our family to own property on the Big Rideau. When he was a young man, he came up often to stay at and go fishing from a big old cottage called *Camp Ottawa* which he co-owned with some other Ottawa businessmen on the shoreline near Bellow's Bay.

Before marrying and starting a family, our grandfather decided to build his own cottage next door to *Camp Ottawa*. It became a gathering place for his friends and family in the days when women always wore long dresses and men wore ties at the cottage. My mother, Eleanor Frances Carson, born in 1921, spent the first and most subsequent summers of her life on the Big Rideau.



LEFT: The older lady on the right in the what looks to be an overcrowded and unstable rowboat is my great grandmother, Mary (Stewart) Wood, and beside her is my grandfather, Hugh Carson, circa 1905.

RIGHT: On the porch and stairs of my grandfather's cottage, ladies in rather uncomfortable looking attire for summer but in keeping for the times, circa 1905.



Like *Camp Ottawa*, eventually purchased by the Murray/Ault families, my grandfather's cottage was one of those wonderful old ones you can still see around the Big Rideau with screened-in porches and stairs in the front. The cottage on the other side of ours was similar and was built and owned by Mr. Freeman Smith. It is the only one of the three in that row that wasn't demolished, and it has been restored and beautifully maintained by Mr. Smith's grandson, David Burns, and his partner Joanne Warren.



ABOVE: My grandmother and grandfather, Edith Mary (Wood) Carson & Hugh Carson, on the cottage steps along with my aunt, Margaret Carson, and my mother, circa 1930.

Before refrigeration, there was an ice house at the back of the property. The ice had either been brought in from elsewhere or had been cut out in the winter and brought up from the lake. Sawdust kept the ice cold throughout the hotter summer months. Though we never experienced the ice house full of ice, it was a great place to play.

I was told that in the very early days there was a boat that came by the shoreline docks on a regular bases selling fresh vegetables to the cottagers. And, built into the slope on one side of the cottage was a stone root

cellar—dark and damp and mysterious for us as young children. The shoreline had many families with children our ages resulting in the carefree and fun times which are now memories of the cottage life of our youth.

Our fresh drinking water came from a well and pump on a platform behind the cottage. (It also supplied drinking water for the Murray/Ault cottage). I can still remember the clanking sound of its pipes and the effort it took to get the water running.

Also, behind the cottage in clump of trees and bushes, there was a well-used two-hole outhouse with a view of the lake through the trees. I seem to recall it had a small hole for us children and a larger one for the adults!

The old electric wringer washer stood in the screened in porch at the back of the cottage. I remember when he was little, Chris somehow managed to put his hand in the wringer all the way up to his elbow before someone got to the plug to pull it out. No permanent damage was caused though there are probably many scars we both still have from mishaps at the lake.



ABOVE: The old cottage was taken down in the 1950's and replaced with a more modern one, left. The bungalow to the right was built with the original old cottage on the property. Circa 1950s.

Our father always burned our garbage in the stone incinerator. He would take the remaining cans by boat to a then unowned island and dump them there. I think we did “own up” to the family who eventually bought and built on that island, but by that time, there was probably not much that hadn't been swallowed up by the earth over time. As a sign of the times, we now have lane garbage and recycling pickup – no need to incinerate or cart stuff up to the dump!



*ABOVE: My brother Chris, our rowboat and our first motor boat.
Note the bandage on his knee! Circa early 1960s.*

There are many summer highlights but a favourite one of ours – and for our neighbours – was the arrival of our Aunt Margaret by pontoon plane. Some of us were even taken for short flights to see our beautiful lake from above.

The lake bottom around the dock in those days was very different from today. The weeds were long and dense. Behind our little wooden motor boat, our father dragged the bottom using a homemade pronged bar to uproot the weeds which then drifted into shore or perhaps even tangled up some boat propellers—who knows!

The old boathouse was a great nesting place for the barn swallows and our old crib docks were perfect for big black dock spiders to hide out. We would often see water snakes sunning on the dock or swimming by. All a rare sight these days.

My brother and I now have our own cottages on the lake opposite Murphy Point Provincial Park. My daughter and her family often visit, as does my nephew. Starting with my grandfather and his mother through to my grandsons, like so many other cottagers, we have many generations of family members born with a little Big Rideau water in their veins.