

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROCK HILL

According to the *Guide Book and Atlas of Muskoka and Parry Sound 1879*, the lot on which Rock Hill came eventually to stand was part of a grant of land to Isaac Dovey, one of the early Muskoka settlers. This tract was in Medora Township, described even then as “the favourite resort of tourists”. The original description of Rock Hill itself is dated October 3, 1891 and signed by W. Galbraith, Ontario Land Surveyor, of Bracebridge. The site map accompanying this description shows a one-acre parcel of land extending two hundred feet along the shore of Lake Rosseau and the same distance inland to form a rough square.

It's not certain when the first structure was built on this lot, but a cottage (named Rock Hill) is shown on G. W. Marshall's well known map of Muskoka, which was published in 1899. A reproduction hangs in the living room between the two doors to the veranda. Rock Hill was then one of just five properties along the lake side between Woodington House and Clevelands House; there are now twenty more than that, including Cedar Rail and the former Lakeside Lodge. It is obvious why the original owners selected the site: not only does it provide the highest elevation along this shore, but it is the only spot in the neighbourhood with an unobstructed view to the far side of Lake Rosseau, at a point just north of the entrance to Brackenrig Bay. As to the name they chose, the rocky nature of the terrain would have been much more evident in the early 1890s, since lumbering throughout the region during the preceding two decades had completely stripped all of the mature trees and most of the undergrowth. The book of period photographs called *Micklethwaite's Muskoka* (a copy is on the bookshelf in the entrance hall) clearly shows how bare and even desolate the landscape appeared at that time.

In the directory accompanying the Marshall map, the owner of “Rockhill Point” is listed as C.V.M. Temple. Mr. Temple purchased the lot in 1891 from the Wood family (after whom Woodington Road is named), who had been farming the portion of the original Dovey tract that included the shoreline of the bay and the point of land to the south. The address of the Temples' city home in 1899 was 47 St. George Street; shortly after that they moved north, to 175 Spadina Road. Their second house still stands, on the east side of Spadina between Bernard and Dupont Avenues. On the site of the first house is located a University of Toronto parking lot. By a remarkable coincidence, this is where Malcolm McGrath parked his car each day for twenty years without realizing the connection to his own cottage!

Over time, the Temples added two rectangular parcels to their summer property -- one to the west and another to the north -- increasing the total acreage to 2.7 and the lake frontage to 300 feet. The edge of the grassy area between the cottage and the garage still marks the old western boundary; the northern annex runs from the row of trees between the boathouse path and the lower driveway to the present property line, which is just south of the neighbours' boathouse. We don't know when the site was enlarged, but a reasonable conjecture is that it occurred in 1937, when Cedar Rail Drive (originally a northward extension of Woodington Road) was put through; it is assumed that the present circular driveway was also created at that time. Another effect of these developments was to move the ‘front’ of the cottage from the lake side to face the road, so it may have been then that the entrance hall (with its unusual curved gable) was built.

The McGraths, who are therefore the fourth family to own the land, purchased Rock Hill in 1970 from the estate of Mr. Temple's youngest son, Arthur, who had died in July of the previous year. In 2003 the family named the lower driveway Arthur Temple Lane in his memory. A neighbour who knew Mr. Temple told the McGraths that Arthur put in this right-of-way so that he could drive to the water's edge when a heart condition prevented him from using the stairs. There is also a memorial window to Arthur Temple and his wife at Christ Church Gregory, which is on the hilltop to the left just past the Joe River Bridge as you head south on Peninsula Road. It was built in 1891, the same year as that on the Rock Hill deed. According to the inscription there, Arthur was born in 1895, so he was a regular visitor to Rock Hill from infancy right through to old age. The records of Upper Canada College (where Arthur was enrolled from 1908 until 1913) indicate that Rock Hill became his principal residence in 1939.

When the McGrath family took possession of the cottage, it was empty except for two very old photographs that someone had propped on the mantelpiece. These are now over the twin beds in the front bedroom (originally Arthur Temple's dining room, as indicated by the chandelier and the china cupboards built into in the east wall). One shows the Temple family at dinner; judging by the women's summer fashions, the picture dates from some time in the 1890s. Note the formality of the attire and the Victorian clutter of the décor! Since there is no child in the photo, it may have been taken before Arthur's birth. The older gentleman at the head of the table is Charles Temple; at the far end is Adelaide, his second wife. The young man and woman seated across from each other are a son and daughter of Mr. Temple by his first marriage. In fact, Arthur had three half-brothers, all of whom were much older than he. Since they also attended Upper Canada College, we know something about them as well. It is interesting to note that all four boys became bankers, even though their father was a stockbroker. The eldest was Cuthbert, who was born in 1869 and attended UCC as a boarder from 1885 to '87, while his family was still residing in the Eastern Townships of Québec. He is most likely the young man in the photograph, since that person appears to be in his early twenties. Next was Edgar, born in 1879 or early 1880. He eventually returned to Québec, where he died of some unidentified cause (perhaps tuberculosis) in 1908. Closest in age to Arthur was Claude, born in 1882. He managed a bank in Vancouver until enlisting in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War. He was wounded in Flanders, recovered at a military hospital in England, and was finally reported missing and presumed dead at the front in September of 1916. His name appears (as C. C. Temple) on the World War I memorial at UCC. Arthur himself left the school in 1913 and joined the Bank of Montreal. He probably retired at the age of forty-four, in the year that Rock Hill became his only address. Like his father, Arthur was married twice, but had no children. His first wife, Grace Alexander, is also commemorated in the window at Christ Church; she died in 1944. He remarried in the late summer of 1948, but his second wife (a widow named Isobel Moir Brown) died the following March. For the last twenty years of his life, Arthur appears to have lived alone.

In that photograph, the room the Temples occupy has French doors in both the foreground and background that are identical to those that still lead from the entrance hall to the living room and then out to the veranda. This suggests that the space shown was much of the extent of the original cottage, probably with two small bedrooms located to either side of it. Since it seems to be only half the width of what is now the living room, two of the bedrooms were probably in the southern half of the present space, where the fireplace and the casement windows are located; the others would

have been where the furnace room, the staircase, and a portion of the master bedroom are today.

A number of other important clues to the design of the original cottage are evident in this photograph. First, the room is open to the rafters, which means that at this date Rock Hill had just one storey. Second, there is no evidence of doorways in either of the pine plank partitions, which suggests that the only access to the bedrooms would have been directly from the veranda through French doors that were slightly smaller than those shown. Three sets of these doors still serve this function: from the southern section of the living room, the master bedroom, and the small bedroom that connects with both the living room and the main bathroom. On the north side of the room in the photo is a small but rather decorative stove. Obviously not meant for cooking, its purpose must have been to provide heat on chilly nights before the fireplace was built. Today it seems odd that the stove pipe runs right across the room to exit through the opposite wall, but this was to take full advantage of the radiant heat produced by the smoke on its way to the brick chimney located (as it is now) on the south side of the cottage. Behind the picture over the mantelpiece can still be seen a metal plate covering the hole through which this pipe would have passed.

In the prevalent cottage design of those days, the earliest version of Rock Hill had a veranda running all the way around it, most of which was eventually incorporated into the main structure as rooms were added over the decades. Evidence for this is provided by the sloping floor and ceiling in the entrance hall (typical veranda features) and the way the floorboards in the present enclosed porch change direction next to the screen door. In those days, the veranda would have been completely open, with just a railing wide enough to perch on -- what is now the ledge under the screens. As at other cottages built around this time, there would have been a broad set of steps to ground level right across from the larger door to the living room. Even now, that screened area is narrower than the others; also, a fake beam has been inserted along its top, perhaps to bridge the opening where a small gable used to extend over the steps.

Needless to say, indoor plumbing would have been installed only after many years of occupation. An outhouse would therefore have been another feature of the property, perhaps located in the area of the tile bed for the present septic system. As to bathing, it would have taken place in Lake Rosseau, for purposes of hygiene as much as for recreation.

Originally the kitchen would (for reasons of fire safety) have been located in a separate structure, most likely 'out back' and connected to the land side of the veranda near the present kitchen. There are still some unaltered nineteenth century Muskoka cottages that have this arrangement; one of them is on Idyl-Wild Point, just across the bay from Cleavelands House. The present kitchen was probably added in the late 1930s, along with the entrance hall, the dining room, and the main bathroom.

As with almost all mainland cottages in the early years, access to Rock Hill was by water only. Peninsula Road (connecting Port Carling to the Village of Rosseau) is shown in the 1879 atlas, but even on the 1899 map there are no side roads leading from it to the various waterfront properties. Instead, the Temple family would have taken the train from Toronto to either Gravenhurst (The Grand Trunk Railway) or Bala (Canadian Pacific), then boarded one of The Muskoka Navigation Company's steamboats for the last part of their journey. The bay on which Rock Hill is located is shallow compared to most other parts of Lake Rosseau; local oral history has it that the

southern end (where Cedar Rail is now) was originally a weedy marsh until it was dredged to allow for swimming and boating. The lack of depth in this part of the lake would have made it hazardous for steamers to make their way right up to cottagers' docks. The Temples seem to have tried two solutions to this problem. On the Marshall map, a very long wharf (similar in proportion to those shown for Clevelands House and Woodington House) extends from Rock Hill; the huge timbers from the cribs can still be seen on the lake bottom more than a hundred feet out from the end of the present dock. But even at that distance from shore, the water is not deep enough for a steamboat to navigate safely. The second (and probably permanent) answer to the problem was the construction of a proper landing on Tommy Rock, the little uninhabited island that is still part of the Rock Hill property. The Marshall map indicates both a wharf and a small structure on the island as of 1899. The second photograph in the old dining room clearly shows this arrangement: the building is just a hut, probably a shelter where people who had been rowed or paddled out from cottages along the shoreline (and perhaps from nearby islands) could await the steamer in wet weather. To this day, large iron hooks and cleats are embedded in the granite of Tommy Rock; these are thought to have secured cables that held the wharf in place. The crib timbers from that long-vanished dock may also be seen underwater to the east of the island. The flagpole that is visible in the photograph was used to signal steamers that there were passengers waiting.

By the way, Tommy Rock is a nickname, probably inspired by 'tommy rot', a popular mild expletive in those days. On the original deed for the island (dated November 23, 1891), "Charles Vesey Macdonald Temple, Gentleman, of the City of Toronto" is said to have paid \$10.00 to the Province of Ontario for "Adelaide Temple Rock", so the island is still officially named for Arthur's mother, yet another link with the early days of cottaging in Muskoka. Another deed (dated November 10, 1894) indicates that Adelaide herself paid \$6.00 to The Department of Crown Lands for the 'water lot' surrounding Tommy Rock. This meant that the property now included (and still does) a circle of lake bottom extending 147 feet in all directions from a hole drilled in the exact centre of the island. The only logical reason for this additional purchase would be to assert ownership of the long wharf already mentioned. Construction may therefore have occurred during the following winter, a frozen lake providing the preferred conditions for building this traditional type of dock.

The McGrath family hope that you enjoy your visit to their bit of Muskoka's heritage.

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