

The Pristine North Shore of Boulder Lake

“Many of you have probably noticed how undeveloped and natural the majority of Boulder lakes north shore is, what you may not know is why!”

Frank & Alice Brown and their extended family have managed to keep it that way for the past 100 years. Alice's grandfather Charles E Ward acquired much of the land from the Immigration Land Co. around 1920. The Ward family had moved from Ada MN to Park Rapids in 1914 where he ran the Hubbard Country Journal from 1914 to 1951. The purchase included about ½ of the Boulder Bay shoreline, about 700 feet bordering on the main body, then east and north to the shore of Round Lake. Initially the property was only 100 acres but over the years the Brown's have acquired various adjoining properties and now have a little over 200 acres.

According to the Brown's abstract, the property was granted by the U.S. Government to the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1890, likely under a provision of the Railroad Act of 1864 that allowed the government to grant large tracts of land to the railroads in order to stimulate settlements. In 1891 the Northern Pacific Railroad deeded the property they didn't need to the Weyerhaeuser Corp.

In 1895 the land was deeded to the Pine Tree Lumber Co. most likely a subsidiary of Weyerhaeuser. It was during this time frame that much of the logging in the area took place. There are two significant events that took place around this same time frame. The Railroad between Park Rapids and Walker and beyond (now the Heartland Trail) was constructed in the 1890's and completed by 1900. At that

time the dominant lumber mill was the Red River Lumber

Mill, owned by T.B.Walker, located on the railroad line in Akeley. The mill was dismantled in 1913 and moved to an area that is now known as the State of Washington. Based on these events the Browns speculate that their land was logged during the 1st decade of the 20th century.

Getting back to their story, Alice recalls her mother Cecelia (Ward) Driscoll telling stories of the family having picnics on the Boulder Point. They have a photo (somewhere) of Cecelia as a teenager/young adult standing on the rocks with the island in the background. These events took place in the early 20's as Charles Ward died at an early age (cancer) in 1926. His wife Alice Ward died in 1940. In the late 30's and 40's the Driscoll family had Sunday picnics at the 'point'! They often rode from their home on Long Lake to Boulder on horseback – Joe Driscoll was an avid horseman.

Again it is unclear from the abstract as to when Joe and Cecelia became owners of the property, ie. before or after the death of Alice Ward in 1940. Alice B. believes that it was before 1940.

Fast forward from the 30's/40's to the 60's/70's and another generation of campers, The Frank and Alice Brown Family with 4 girls and 3 boys converged on the property. They had a tent big enough for 10-12 on bunk cots. The kids were eager to show off their wilderness camping skills that they had learned from scouting experiences. The Driscoll grand-parents and Uncle Chuck Driscoll often joined them for campfires and July 4th fireworks over Boulder Lake.



In the early 70's there was a major break through in wilderness camping style for the Brown's, they acquired a used out-house from a near-by farmer through an ad in the Park Rapids Enterprise. There was one more minor glitch however! They had loaded the green 2-holer on their two wheeled trailer and as they were leaving the yard met a man with another trailer coming into the yard. The farmer mistakenly thought that they were the party that he had previously sold it to over the phone! There was no confrontation and they were able to keep it. Frank said he couldn't help but think that when they saw the station wagon filled with children they had decided that he needed it much more than they did! According to Frank it definitely changed their Wilderness Camping Style.

Another major event came about on a July afternoon in 1976 when they received a call in St. Cloud from Alice's brother Chuck with the message that the island with the little cabin and adjoining 34 acres on the mainland was listed for sale. Alice gathered the family in the station wagon (Frank was working on call!) and the same afternoon met the realtor and did a survey of the island cabin. They returned jubilant and reported that an earnest money down payment had been made on an island/cabin that 'slept' 12 people! They purchased it with a loan from the Dorset State Bank (now a gift shop). Charles Pierce of Minneapolis the owner had died, his sole heir was his daughter Laurie Trayling who was now living in England. A cedar boat and 7 HP Johnson engine that the Driscoll's had allowed Mr. Pierce to park on the point went with the deal. During the remainder of the summer the family pitched in and did a major clean-up, thrilled to find many treasures that revealed much of the habits and interests of the Pierce family. It was shortly after this in 1976 that Joe and Cecelia (Ward) Driscoll actually gifted the land to the Browns and other members of the family.

The first major family project was erecting a building; it was 4' X 12' and referred to as "The Sauna". It took the amateur carpenters without power tools the weekends of two summers to complete it. To create the effect of being out in nature while in the hot humid sauna, the original building had a large window (sky light) in the roof - didn't last long leaky! Water was pumped from the lake into a barrel mounted 30 feet up on the trunk of a large white pine tree, flowed down through a hose into an outdoor water heater, and into a sink and shower stall-very compact! The bald eagle you may have seen started nesting above the sauna around 2003-2004. The island/cabin has been a big attraction for the expanding family - they now have 19 grand children - all eager to be on "the Island".

In 1977 they were contacted by a realtor that the 40 acres north of the land that came with the island purchase was for sale. On the land were the remnants of a lumber mill and deep saw dust that only recently has decayed. Over the years many white pine seedlings have appeared in the saw-dust and have been transplanted. In 2002 the owner of the land bordering on the Sand River - (37 acres) - died and they acquired that also. They now had approximately 200 acres.

Early on they had thoughts of restoring some of the land back to forest similar to the pre-logging days. They often hiked the logging roads (2) that crossed west and north through the property. They also had an old gray Cherokee jeep that both young and old enjoyed crashing through the brush - According to Frank they were very fortunate to have mechanics willing to work on it.



continued on page 10

continued from page 7

In 1977 Frank & Alice contacted Al Wickman a DNR forester in Park Rapids. He did extensive mapping of vegetation and terrain on the property. Based on this they developed a plan for long range reforestation – basically clearing, site preparation, and planting of native trees. At the time the U.S. Dept of Agriculture had an incentive cost sharing for carrying out a prescribed plan. In 1979 the Brown's planted the first 10 acre plot of Norway pine and spruce at the recommended rate of 700 trees per acre. They did do some of the planting, but most was done by a group of people from a local church organization that did it as a fund raiser.

They followed a plan of clearing / planting every 1 – 3 years until they had planted approximately 35,000 trees. They favored Norway over white pine species because of the prevalent White Pine Blister Disease. There was much family involvement in controlling the competing vegetation in the early years.



They did some minor harvesting of Birch and Aspen as well as a few Pine over the years, and in the fall of 2015 had a major thinning of



the original pine plantings. In 2002 after about 25 years and 1000's of lake crossings loading and unloading on each end they had the new cabin constructed on the mainland by Gary Nicholson constr. With it being the central point between, the woods and trails, the beach, and the rustic island cabin. The complex provides for much family unity and recreation -- as well as some labor.

In 2004 they were in contact with Laurie

Trayling from whom they had purchased the island. Laurie and her husband Dr Tony Trayling along with adult children and spouses traveled from England and spent a long weekend on the island. They could hear the splashing and laughter across the bay. They also learned much more about the background of the island and the cabin. Her father Charles

Pierce acquired the island in 1938. She also provided them with photos – one in particular says much about the island and it's surroundings – Charles Pierce holding his daughter Laurie, now in her mid 70's, about age 2 on the back step of the island cabin with a car parked next to it (think about that one for a minute).

Special thanks to Frank & Alice Brown for sharing this great story.