

The Origin of Toohey Bay

Those of you who have been on the lake for some time will know that the bay on the northwest shore of the lake has always been affectionately known as Toohey Bay. I have owned property on the East shore of Toohey Bay for 15+ years and have heard many tales as to how the bay got its name. However the story that follows is to the best of my knowledge the true facts.

The Toohey Family History

Timothy Toohey was the eldest son of Thomas and Katherine Toohey, Irish immigrants to the area who became established and respected farmers around Otter and Bass Lake. Initially Thomas and Katherine farmed land along the boundary between South Elmsley and South Burgess. Within a few years they acquired land on the North shore of Otter Lake and built a homestead in the area about three miles from the lakeshore. Young Timothy, who was likely born around 1855, attended the Otter Lake school which was one of many single room schoolhouses built in the late 1800's to educate the children of the early settlers in the area. Otter Lake school was located between Otter and Bass lakes, probably in the vicinity of what is now Road B9. In 1891 Timothy Toohey married Bridget Doyle in Philipsville. Bridget Doyle was the daughter of another family of Irish settlers to the area. Between 1892 and 1912 Timothy and Bridget had two sons and 10 daughters. Timothy probably inherited the family farm on Otter Lake after the death of his parents and continued it's operation along with his two sons, Thomas and Bernard.



S.S. 8, Otter Lake school in the 1890s. Teacher Jan McVerty, parents and pupils in the section. Some of the people in the photo are William Tweedy, William Miller, the Copelands, Timothy Toohey, Albert and Edward Wood, John Wood, Robert Wood, Charlie Losby, John Pegg.

The Tragic Event in 1921

On August 9, 1921, a typical very hot and humid August day, Timothy and Bernard went down to the lake to cut beaver hay, the tall grass that grows around wetlands and beaver ponds. In early farming days it was used as horse feed. The men were accompanied by the Toohey's eldest daughter, Kathleen aged 25 who had just returned from Toronto for her summer vacation with a friend, Evelyn Broscher. Along with Kathleen and Evelyn were the two youngest Toohey girls, Dorothy aged 12 and Laura aged 9. The girls were not there to work and they had gone down to what was then known as Fletchers beach to "bathe". Fletchers beach was a picturesque sandy beach on the west shore of the lake that was near a steep ledge and none of the family had ever bathed in that vicinity before. The beach rapidly sloped down to water that was 20 feet deep at this point owing to a deep channel which skirts the lake coming close to shore near the ledge. The two youngest girls waded into deep water and

immediately got into difficulty. Laura was the first to call for help, and Dorothy did likewise immediately thereafter. Kathleen, who was bathing in shallow water at the time rushed to their aid although she was unable to swim and she too soon got into difficulty. Timothy and Bernard, both of whom were good swimmers, heard the calls for help from the girls, rushed to the spot and jumped in the water fully clothed. Evelyn Broscher ran to summon help at which time, Timothy Toohey could be seen swimming to shore with Laura. When Evelyn returned with Mr. Cecil Wood, a neighbour and the first person she had met, nothing was to be seen of the Toohey family and only the hats of the father and son, floating on the surface of the water denoted that a tragedy had occurred.

The bodies were eventually recovered at a distance of 40 feet from the shore and within an area of 15 feet. Neighbours aided in the search for the bodies and two were recovered by diving, the others by grappling. The search party was composed of Alf Baker, of Smiths Falls, L.W. Wright of Lombardy, C.D. Williamson and William Miller. The first body to be recovered was that of little Laura Toohey. The body of her elder sister Kathleen, was the next brought to the surface. Coroner Dr. Anderson, who investigated the fatalities the following morning stated that it was a plain case of the men being overcome by cramps and hypothermia in the cold water after being overheated from working in the fields. No inquest was held as Dr. Anderson stated that the fatalities were accidental. The funeral of Mr. Toohey and his four children was held on Thursday August 11 in the Catholic Church at Lombardy (on Anglican Church Road) and all 5 members of the Toohey family who drowned in Otter Lake on August 9 were buried in the adjoining Catholic cemetery. The 5 headstones can still be found along with Bridget Toohey who was also buried along with her husband Timothy, Bernard, Kathleen, Dorothy and Laura. However Bridget's headstone reads 1954 whereas the other 5 all read 1921. Bridget Toohey was 82 when she died. She was survived by Thomas, her only remaining son and six daughters, Helen, Edna, May, Marguerite, Leona, and Ursula.



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