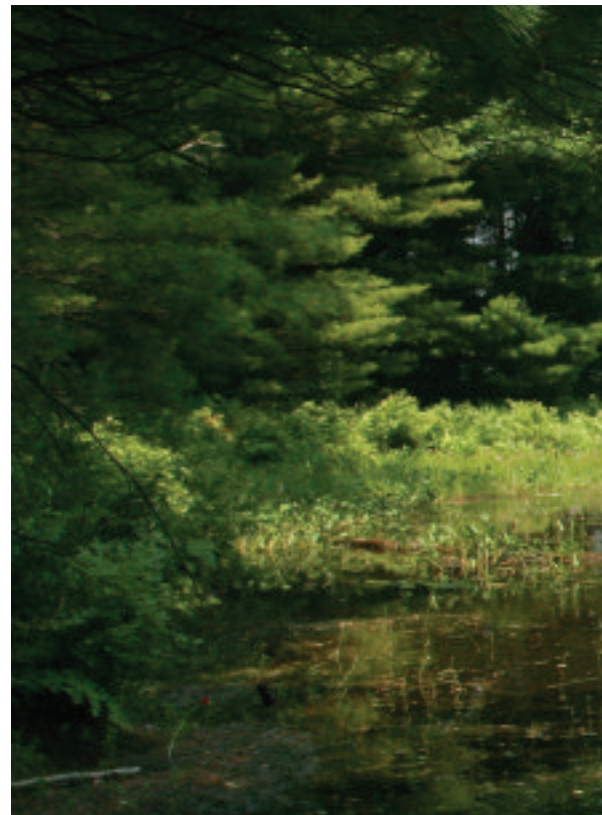




(Historic photos provided by Massasauga Provincial Park).



An Ontario Parks sign near the waterfront marks the historic Calhoun Lodge, pictured above, a site open to the public. Behind the lodge, a three-hour hiking loop leads to the site of another historic homestead – the Baker Homestead, passing by the outlet of Little Blackstone Lake, right.



Calhoun Lodge

Reflections of 1930s cottage life

By Jack Tynan
Photos by Janalene Kingshott

When a Cleveland lawyer fell in love with a piece of Georgian Bay shoreline in the 1930s and started building, he built to last.

Paddling across Blackstone Harbour, where only a few cottages pepper what is mostly shoreline within Massasauga Provincial Park, “Judge” Joseph C. Calhoun’s seasonal home stands out.

Poking through the trees on a rocky outcrop, from a distance the log buildings he erected using hand tools and hard labour appear to have resisted the duress of time.

Upon closer inspection, it looks as if the

Calhoun family left the property with plans to return – a wheelbarrow decaying where it sat behind the main building, farm equipment ready to be hooked up to horses ...

But Calhoun and his family have been absent since 1972, when the ailing “judge” died. Two years later, the land was sold to the Ministry of Government Services, who hoped to start a provincial park in the area someday.

Although park staff, contractors and volunteers have worked at the site, local property owners and park supporters are hoping to spearhead a new plan to maintain the cherished site.





Inside the main building, the Calhoun Lodge, antique furniture collected and donated by area cottagers make it appear almost as if the Calhoun family just left.

“It’s a question of the human history of the area,” said long-time cottager Sue McPhedran. “It would be a real shame to lose it.”

When Calhoun started working on his lodge, the first building was a main room and bedroom attic. Apparently a workhorse, Calhoun added front and side porches to the white-pine log building, using logs from the 300-acre property, treating the wood with creosote, and using horse hair chinking to seal and insulate.

Over time, the site expanded, and an aging scrapbook of black and white photos from the site shows Calhoun, family members and visitors hard at work.

A friend, a stonemason from Ohio, built the stone fireplace and chimney. A bathroom and bedroom were added. Behind the main building, Calhoun built a separate building for the kitchen, with an attached laundry room.

Later still, a cold storage building and firewood shed were built.

When Calhoun’s daughter Betty Jo turned 16, he built a cabin she could stay in when she visited from Cleveland – now called Betty’s Cabin.

A dock and boathouse, which are no longer there, were added. A



An archived photograph from Massasauga Provincial Park shows Joseph Calhoun on his 300-acre estate on Blackstone Harbour.



Above, a lively stream feeds out of Little Blackstone Lake, where Thomas Baker and his son Charles eked out a living. Two crosses, below, mark the graves of the father and son. Inset, "Judge" Calhoun, right, and his caretaker Jerome Cascanette in a photo kept in Massasauga Provincial Park archives.



maintenance shed was built in 1949 to store a tractor and other equipment. A generator and power shed were also added, providing electricity.

In 1963, as the property continued to expand, Calhoun hired Jerome Cascanette as a caretaker. Cascanette stayed on site all year, looking after the property, gardening, taking care of animals – Old Mikey the horse, cows, chickens and pigs – in a nearby barn, living in a caretaker's house. Somehow, he cut hay in an area now overgrown with sumacs and raspberry bushes.

Photos in the scrapbook, now carefully tucked away in the office of park superintendent Mike Foley, away from the hands of vandals, show ice being cut from the lake for the cold storage shed, and numerous shots of Calhoun and others soaking up the sun, enjoying a drink, working on the property – and otherwise enjoying aspects of cottage life most shoreline property owners still strive for.

While the site continues to welcome and attract visitors, the buildings are now sealed as over the decades decay and bat droppings carrying dangerous bacteria have forced park staff to restrict access.

Vandals have also forced staff to remove some artifacts and close buildings.

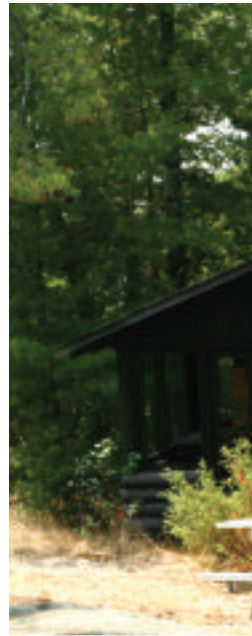
About 20 years ago, park staff members were housed at the site, before modern health and safety rules highlighted the risks of leaving young employees out in such a remote area, Foley said.

Today, park staff visits the site, and clears the Baker trail, a three-hour hiking route that leads to the foundation of another building where a father-son duo tried to eke out life on the rock-strewn land.





Clockwise from bottom left: A water tower lays a few feet from its stand; the maintenance shed, the generator shed; which still holds the original generator; looking down at Betty's Cabin, which Calhoun added for his daughter's visits; the beginning of the Baker Trail; and, farm equipment at the site looks like it sits right where the Calhoun family left it.





And a few years ago, park staff cleaned out the main building and Betty's cabin, and some restoration work was done. But after a few months of abandonment, nature had taken over again.

"I'd like to see more people getting use out of it," said Foley. "The catch-22 is that if the building's not used, the bats and the mice move back in, the vandals visit. Funding (for clean-up and repairs) is not going to be very helpful if year one, two, three go by without regular upkeep."

Now McPhedran and a group about 25 cottagers, area residents and regular Massasauga Provincial Park campers are in the midst of creating an official Friends of Massasauga Park group to lead initiatives that might preserve sites like the Calhoun Lodge. The group has filed its incorporation papers, and is looking at other support groups attached to nearby provincial parks for a template and strategies for carrying out similar projects.

One historic lighthouse, for example, has a volunteer caretaker living on site, McPhedran said.

"We thought of doing some fundraising, but if you want to do any fundraising for a provincial park, you have to have a formal affiliation," she said. "I think everyone's quite excited. We've had law clinic students from the University of Western Ontario help with our incorporation papers. We've had volunteers work with park staff doing trail cleanups, building bridges. And we're certainly going to look at the Calhoun site."

With a volunteer caretaker, "Even just the presence, the fresh tracks around the site, people would understand it's being cared for," she added. "The park staff is really pressed for time, and we definitely want to do anything we can to complement their work."

"I'm a relative newcomer, but we have a lot of people whose history (in the area) goes back to the early 1900s, they remember the Calhouns. Part of the fascination might be the architecture, that they built these buildings with hand tools, but it's emotional too."



In the meantime, park staff members clearly have their own affinity for the site. The staff boats prove it. One is named the Willebejobe, a combination of the names of Calhoun's children, William and Betty Jo, and his wife Betty Dean. The other two boats are Mikey, named after the Calhoun horse, and Jerome, named after the caretaker who eventually dressed in his best clothes, grabbed a bottle of scotch and took his own life at the site by laying down beside a running tractor in the maintenance shed in 1968.

Most of The Woods Bay Community Association members also have affection for the site. About six years ago, association president Bruce Mortensen moved annual general meetings that used to be hosted in the homes of different members each year to the Calhoun Lodge.

Tents are erected, speakers set up, and about 90 people arrive by boat for the annual meeting.

"If you've been there you know it is filled with so much history," Mortensen said. "For the community, it's a pretty important site." *

