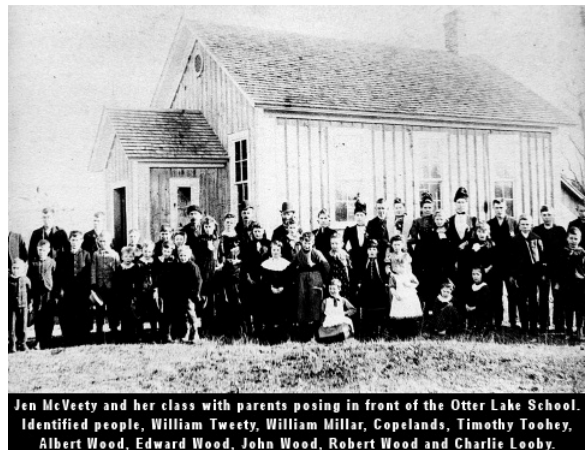


The Toohey Bay Tragedy

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 West shore of Otter Lake and built a homestead in South Elmsley in an area that was about three miles from the lakeshore, probably on Otter lake Road. Timothy Toohey was born in 1867 and 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. Timothy would have been one of the older children in the picture on the right. In 1891 Timothy Toohey married Bridget Doyle in Philippsville. Bridget Doyle was the daughter of another family of Irish settlers to the area. Between 1893 and 1912 Timothy and Bridget had two sons and 10 daughters. Thomas was born in 1893, Bernard in 1895, Kathleen in 1896, Edna in 1902, May in 1904, Margaret in 1905, Leona in 1906, Ursula in 1908, Dorothy in 1910 and finally Laura in 1912. The 1921 census indicates that Timothy and Bridget, along with Bernard and the 7 youngest girls lived together. Thomas and Kathleen had presumably left the family home by that time. Timothy probably inherited the family farm on Otter Lake after the death of his parents and continued it's operation initially with his two sons and then with Bernard after Thomas left home.



Jen McVeety and her class with parents posing in front of the Otter Lake School. Identified people, William Tweety, William Millar, Copelands, Timothy Toohey, Albert Wood, Edward Wood, John Wood, Robert Wood and Charlie Looby.

The Tragic Event in 1921

On August 9, 1921, a typical very hot and humid August day, Timothy aged 54 and Bernard aged 26 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 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. Since she was unable to swim, she too soon got into difficulty and was unable to help her younger sisters. 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 Mr. Toohey was seen swimming to shore with Laura. Even though Evelyn was not familiar with the area she did manage to find Mr. Cecil Wood, a neighbouring farmer and the first person she had met. However, when they returned to the shore 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. 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 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 others all read 1921.

Bridget Toohey was 82 when she died. She was survived by Thomas, her only remaining son and six remaining daughters.

References

Ancestry.ca

South Elmsley in the Making by James R. Kennedy

Sue Warren, Rideau Lakes Public Library Local History Centre.