



The View from Paddy's Bay

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This is the first of what I hope will be a series of regular viewpoint articles on matters of potential interest to residents and visitors of the Municipality of Whitestone. Topics may include points of interest (historical or otherwise), matters of municipal governance and policy, background on current issues, and anything else that interests me enough to write about it and that I think might be worth sharing.

The term *viewpoint* is important. I try my best to be accurate and to base my opinions on facts. And if I state something as a given I will usually reference the authority. But please remember.... unless otherwise stated, the views, opinions and comments here are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Municipality of Whitestone or the views of its Council.

My hope is that you will find these articles both interesting and informative, and that they will cause you to reflect further on the topics raised, and maybe even to do your own research on them. As always, I welcome questions, comments, and dialogue from readers. It is my belief that dialogue on matters of importance to our community is crucial to its progress and to the well being of its members.

So what's the deal with Paddy's Bay? It just happens that Paddy's Bay has been the location of my family's home on WahWashKesh¹ for over seventy years. The property was originally a patent grant to one Patrick McCabe, yeoman ("Paddy") under the *Free Grants and Homesteads Act* of 1868. Its history is documented in detail in the Whitestone Historical Society's 2018 publication *Whitestone - From Gordon Lake to the Bunny Trail*.

Although the property was not the most desirable farmland, Paddy attempted to farm it, and was able to satisfy the conditions of the homestead grant and obtain legal title to it. He even attempted to drain two small ponds on the property that are surrounded with floating bog (shown on some maps as McCabe's Lake and Munson's Lake) by digging a network of drainage ditches and dynamiting an outlet to WahWashKesh, which today flows through a culvert under the WahWashKesh Road. But what attracted my parents to it was that it included over two hundred acres of forest and wetland, a large

¹ *WahWashKesh* is purported to be a translation of *Deer Lake* in Cree, because that is how early settlers heard the natives refer to the lake. It originally appeared on maps as *Deer Lake*, as did the CN rail station at what is now Ardbeg. Because there were other lakes in Ontario (and elsewhere) named *Deer Lake*, officials decided to rename the lake *WahWashKesh*. Renaming of the rail station followed suit, and the name *Ardbeg* was chosen because the station master of the day happened to be from Ardbeg, Scotland.

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tract of beautiful shoreline on WahWashKesh with three good sand beaches, and a two-storey log building that had been built in 1928 by its previous owner, Austin Buchanan.

Starting in 1949, we spent summers here. Until 1954, we were off-grid: no road access, no hydro, no running water, ice refrigeration. In those days, a trip from Toronto took almost nine hours. We accessed the lake from a public landing at the end of the Parker Bay Road. Most of our needed supplies were sent by rail to Ardbeg station, which was then still a real railway stop. It was glorious isolation: if we heard the sound of a motor boat we would go out to see who it was. I can recall delivering by boat notices of the inaugural meeting of what became the WahWashKesh Conservation Association to all the cottages on the lake. In the 1960s there weren't that many of them, and we knew who owned each one.

Our first winter trip to the lake took place in 1958, and was quite an adventure. By then we had a seasonal road (not plowed in winter past the Gorham farm, and barely passable in the spring), hydro service, running water and indoor plumbing, and electric refrigeration. By the late 1960s we were holding our Thanksgiving and New Years celebrations at WahWashKesh.

Until the 1990s, telephone service was non-existent or problematic at best. I can remember in the early years driving into Dunchurch to make calls from a pay phone located at Dobbs General Store. It was connected to a rural network of bare nickel steel wires on poles with glass insulators that was operated by the Muskoka – Parry Sound Telephone Company headquartered in Emsdale. Sometimes, the connection was so poor you could not make out what the person on the other end was saying (and vice-versa). 1920-era wooden magneto telephones like the one shown below were still in use in the area until the 1950s. After Bell Canada took over the territory, land line service eventually made it to the south shore of the lake adjacent to Hwy 520, and there was a pay phone at the Maple Island Store (still there today). A few places on the lake, including the WahWashKesh Lodge, had VHF telephone service. But it wasn't until the early 1990s that analogue cell phone service was possible using 3-watt bag phones that could connect to Bell's Pointe au Baril cell site using a 700Mhz yagi antenna and bouncing the signal off the water. It was only twelve years ago in September, 2008 that we achieved regular cell service with 911 capability and limited internet on WahWashKesh, with the erection of Bell's Taylor Bay cell site.



Stromberg Carlson Model 896 Magneto Telephone

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Until the Municipality of Whitestone came into existence in the year 2000, WahWashKesh was in an unorganized township (McKenzie). We paid (negligible) property taxes to the Province, plus a small amount to the McKenzie Burpee Local Roads Board for maintenance of the WahWashKesh Road, which had been completed in 1953. There were no municipal by-laws or regulations, no building permits were required, and so on. About as laissez faire as you can get. When discussions about possible municipal organization began in the late 1990s, one proposal was to annex all of the sparsely populated area north of Parry Sound as far as Dunchurch to the Town of Parry Sound. Concerned that we would be overtaken by bureaucracy, and would end up paying higher taxes for no benefit in terms of additional municipal services, I lobbied the government of the day and made a submission to the OMB opposing such widespread amalgamation. Fortunately, we ended up with a series of more reasonable local amalgamations that resulted in today's seven West Parry Sound municipalities (from south to north): Seguin, Parry Sound, McDougall, Archipelago, Carling, McKellar, and Whitestone.

Before leaving the subject of amalgamation, I should point out that most Provincial politicians tend to the view that small municipalities like ours are less viable and less desirable than larger ones. Whenever I encounter former Muskoka Parry Sound MLA and Ontario Premier Ernie Eves, he asks me "Have you guys (meaning the West Parry Sound municipalities) amalgamated yet?", to which I reply "No, thank God." At the ROMA Conference this past February, I was chatting with the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs when he opined that Parry Sound must need an upper tier municipal structure to deal with certain common issues like economic development, land use planning, and shared services. My response to him was that we are collaborating effectively in these areas without the need for an added layer of governance bureaucracy and its associated costs.

For me, our challenge is to demonstrate consistently that we can (i) serve our ratepayers and manage our affairs as competently and efficiently as larger municipalities, (ii) work together in areas of common interest where we can achieve economies of scale, and (iii) preserve and build on the unique characteristics and values of each community. I accept this challenge, and believe it can be met without further amalgamation or an upper tier municipal government.

While we value our independence as a municipality, and the opportunity it brings to reflect Whitestone's unique character and priorities as a community, we can't be "an island entire of itself"². Whitestone is in many ways tightly linked to and dependent on the other communities in West Parry Sound. This is especially true in terms of employment, procurement of goods and services, health care, social and cultural amenities, and economic development. Sometimes, it is in the best interest of the region as a whole to plan and act collectively with our neighbouring municipalities to accomplish objectives that none of could achieve separately on our own. Economically and socially speaking, when our collective water level goes up, everyone's boat floats higher.

² John Donne: *Devotions* (1624)