



THE GULL ROCK GAZETTE



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KILCOO CANOES - A BRIEF HISTORY

Kilcoo Camp did not always have canoes. When camp opened in 1932 the beach scene featured a few rowboats and soon after several small boats, later called punts, were purchased from a local outfitter.

Then as camp moved into the 1940's, 16' canvas covered wood canoes were purchased from the Peterborough Canoe Company and a little later some more canoes with a flatter bottom were bought from the Canadian Canoe Company. The Peterboroughs lasted into the 1960's and a few were even on the dock as late as 2010, though not in good shape, and those were eventually conscripted for half canoe sized shelving units. Among those Peterborough's there were two 12' canoes and 1 sail canoe with rigging that disappeared after only a few years use.

The 1950's saw a transition into canoes made by local boat builder May Minto whose brother Bob opened Minto Marine in 1956. May's background presents quite a story.

May Minto lived within a 10 mile radius of Minden all her life, but thanks to her, thousands of people have been able to travel to some of the most beautiful places in cottage country and beyond.

Her only break from living locally came in the early 1940s, when she and her sister Winnie answered the government's call for help at a munitions factory where May first worked the lathe on the nose cones for anti-tank shells at Massey Ferguson and then went to Victor Aircraft where she was a riveter on the Lancaster bombers.

After the war she worked at numerous projects for the University of Toronto Survey Camp on Gull Lake where she began making canoes. Then after her brother Bob opened Minto Marine on Highway 35 at the corner of the Bobcaygeon Road (where the current JugCity/Shell is), she began creating her well known 16' canvas covered cruiser canoes which she began selling to local camps like Kilcoo, Onondaga and Gay Venture. May would construct about 25 canoes a year with the basic construction done during the winter with varnishing and painting done in the spring. In fact, Mintos are very rare outside the local geographical area.

After Bob sold the marina in 1983 the new owner, faced with a continued demand for her canoes, convinced her to continue her canoe building for another year.

For Kilcoo, May Minto's retirement created a few challenges both in terms of the required maintenance of the Kilcoo fleet and finding a source for new canoes as the Peterboroughs came to the end of their lives. A good friend of John Latimer, Peter Gilbert, was closing his Camp Nominique and he sold two or three canoes to Kilcoo, a couple were purchased from the Chestnut Canoe Company, and at about this time fiberglass (and later, Kev-



The Minto Marine 1957



The Minto Label



Marc prepping the fleet for winter storage



Canoe Dock 1955

lar) canoes were being introduced for use in the tripping program.

Through the late 1980's into the 90's in the absence of a reliable source for new canoes, maintenance of the camp's canoes fell to the camp maintenance staff of Brian Hamilton and Bob Emerson who, while not having any formal training or proper resources at hand, devoted many hours making necessary repairs in time for each new camp season.

However, there did not seem to be any way Kilcoo could replenish the Kilcoo fleet with canoes that could compare with the Minto

Continued on page 2.

Continued from cover...

canoes. That is, until alumnus Marc Russell put into action a plan to create a new fleet of Minto 16' canoes.

It started with a "retro engineered" mould of a traditional Minto model provided by Dave Blandford which Marc used to begin what would become a 14 year program of renovating about 20 of Kilcoo's aging canoes and building 26 newly created from the mould. For the first two years Marc worked as the on site canoe builder before moving his operation to Toronto while building his company, Gull Lake Boat Works. Many alumni through those years are fully aware of Marc's work as he was proud to restore or custom build many canoes for individual alumni.

As Kilcoo's older canoes are gradually phased out it will become increasingly

important that new canoes are available to sustain the camp's fleet of canvas covered cedar plank canoes. Today, Marc continues to offer his consulting expertise to Kilcoo's new owners, KCA Ownership Corporation, and it is hoped canoeing will continue to be at the center of the camp's summer program and a key to Kilcoo's ongoing future success.

I have written the above article borrowing text from an article in the Haliburton Echo newspaper by Martha Perkins and with assistance from Marc Russell, former camp staff member and now alumnus whose vision and passion took flight following the work of alumnus Scott Walker who in 2007 restored Chief John Latimer's 16' Minto and led to Marc's restoration of the Kilcoo canoe fleet.



PAUL CHAMBERLAIN



Minto Canoe 1973



Paddling the new Minto

EDITOR'S MUSINGS

In the late fall of 1931 Charles Plewman and his wife Ethel first surveyed the shores of Gull Lake. Influenced by his friend Taylor Statten's project to open a boys camp in Algonquin Park, Charlie then signed a "rent to purchase" contract with Toronto financier Dan Lackie and so Kilcoo Camp was born.

It was in the late fall 24 years later that John Latimer, with the financial backing of Toronto financier George Atkins, purchased Kilcoo. It was notable that Charlie Plewman had resisted entreaties from Kitchener YMCA to allow a committed staff alumnus to purchase the camp and keep it going as a private boys' camp.

Fast forward 70 years to late fall, 2025 and an equally committed group of staff alumni began negotiations under the tutelage of David Spindler to purchase Kilcoo. And so, under the new ownership of KCA Ownership Corp. Kilcoo will once again be assured of continuing to build on its 95 year long legacy. Children's camps today face many more obstacles in the way of success. Just in the local Haliburton area it has claimed Calumet, Sherwood Forest, Samac and Gay Venture. So the challenges will be great, but I hope with support from all alumni whose connection to the camp remains strong, the Kilcoo Camp that influenced all of our lives will continue to offer the same opportunities to countless more in the years ahead.

I often think of the day in 1967 when the owner of a Lake of Bays boys camp, upon deciding to retire, asked me why Amici couldn't purchase and continue to run his camp. In that year we were budgeting for 3 campers. Well, in 2025, the organization that we created many years ago sent enough children to camp as could have completely filled Kilcoo for both July and August.

For all of us who cherish our years at Kilcoo and the many friendships that grew from there, I think we owe a debt of gratitude to the alumni who came together at Dave Spindler's bidding to start another chapter in the Kilcoo story.



PAUL CHAMBERLAIN
1956-67

TINGLES' TAKE

A message from the director

Winter has turned to spring, April has turned to May, and Kilcoo has turned to the future. Congratulations to the KCA Ownership Corporation and to our Executive Director, Dave Spindler. It is very encouraging to have a group of committed owners who believe in the future of Kilcoo Camp. Thank you to the Latimer family for their decades of stewardship, and for instilling a love of Kilcoo and summer camp in so many of us. I will do my best to help Dave and the KCA group, as they take the paddle and steer Kilcoo towards the 95th summer and beyond!

The Advance Camp crew is now up north on Gull Lake, and the spring clean-up has begun. We have stag weekends, family weekends, school groups and more to look forward to this spring. Let's hope for good weather and a quick departure of the black flies. Pre-Camp starts on June 22nd and the summer longs for endless days, epic paddles, smiles, laughter and lessons. From the tetherball pole to the archery range; the canoe docks to the ceramic wheel; the Shaderdome to the Outer-A and sing-songs in the Lodge, there are so many places and spaces for memories to be made, just as it was in your day. We will raise our anthem to thee, sing proudly and make the best of our time on Gull Lake this summer.

The Gull Rock Gazette is an important tool to keep our community engaged and informed. Thank you Paul Chamberlain and Mike Adamson for another issue; you gentlemen do an excellent job. I trust the Alumni will enjoy it and will help stave off the days until the end of September and the next staff reunion!

Our 95th summer promises to be an exciting one, as we embark upon Kilcoo's next chapter. The Staff and LITs are eager to ensure the campers have an incredible experience. I am excited to work with Dave as he returns to Kilcoo, and Buzz, Brador, Tobias, Wyatt, Stu, Michael, Morgan, Charlie, Liam, Carson, Ben, Harry, Drew and Sara, our Senior Staff. They are a fine and committed bunch. So, if you are ever in the neighbourhood, please stop by to say hello and meet them -- and a cabin group that may be wandering by! The gates to our special place on Gull Lake are always open.



 **CHEERS,**
PATRICK TINGLEY – "TINGLES"

THE SPINDRIFT - DAVE SPINDLER

There's a moment on a canoe trip - usually somewhere deep in the backcountry, you get to the end of a tough portage, high-five the boys while wearily clutching your Nalgene, knees weak, shoulders burning - where you look around at your crew and think: "We actually did it!" That's how I feel about KCA Ownership Corp. and the purchase of Kilcoo Camp.

For those just catching up: KCA Ownership Corp. is the alumni-driven organization that has officially purchased Kilcoo Camp. Our sole purpose, full stop, is to build the best and most resilient Kilcoo we possibly can - one that remains true to this community's cherished heritage, traditions, and legacy for generations to come. Our ownership group is united in their commitment to rebuilding and reinvesting in this special place, and the courage and generosity they have demonstrated in making this happen is nothing short of remarkable. They did so because they believe, deeply, in the transformative power of Kilcoo Camp.

I want to be clear, though: every single one of our alumni had a hand in this incredible outcome. The love and support for Kilcoo's future that poured out of this community - that's what inspired this initiative in the first place. This story, this camp, this moment - it belongs to all of us. Kilcoo is forever.

Now. Welcome to the very first edition of the Spindrift! For those who aren't aware, spindrift is the fine mist carried across water by high winds - and honestly, that's exactly how this whole journey has felt: lifted and carried forward by the tailwinds of this incredible community.

Allow me to introduce myself, because if we haven't met yet, I hope we can fix that very soon.

My name is Dave Spindler, and I am the new Executive Director of Kilcoo Camp. I'm also a Kilcoo camper through and through. I started as a camper as a young boy, undersized, nervous and homesick. I went on to, like so many of us, find passions and friendships that have endured my lifetime through experiences as a camper, LIT, counsellor, and ultimately a long-time tripper. I was lucky enough to run the Nahanni River Trip twice: once as a camper, and again years later as a guide.



Dave and Pat



Kilcoo shaped me. It taught me how to lead, how to listen, and how to learn. It was here that I learned to find the line through fast moving water, and when to seek refuge in a backchannel. I don't take lightly what it means to now be in this role.

On the home front: I'm excited for you all to get to know my wife Jenna, our two-year-old daughter Marigold, and our very good dog Bonnie, and - coming in hot this August - our first baby boy.

While our due date is causing some logistical hurdles, we could not be more excited to bring our family into this community, meet all of you, and make new Kilcoo memories of our own.

For the fall, spring and summer programming rundown, make sure you read Tingles' Take - Co-Director Tingles has all the details on what's in store this season, and you can trust this is going to be a summer worth talking about.

What I will say is this: I could not be more excited to be joining Tingles and the incredible group of Senior Staff, Staff, and LITs who will be helping to set the tone for this new era of Kilcoo. The energy is real, the commitment is real, and the summer ahead is going to be something special.

And if you need one date to circle on your calendar right now, let it be this: **September 25th to 27th, 2026**. Kilcoo's 95th Anniversary Alumni Reunion, up on Gull Lake. Ninety-five magical summers. Wow! We are going to celebrate this community the way it deserves - together, at camp, on the water, around the fire. More details to come, but start making plans and get those registration forms in!

The best days at Kilcoo have always been ahead of us. That's still true.

Please don't hesitate to come visit us if you're in the area, and we'll see you on the lake!

RIP RAM
DAVE SPINDLER

KILCOO SAUNA CLUB REUNION

A group of twelve of us met every night at 11:00pm when we were Senior Staff at camp to end our day with a sauna. We were affectionately known as the Kilcoo Sauna Club. We met back at camp this past winter for a reunion, and it was so special to us. We played Frisbee golf, had rhetoric to catch up on our lives, ate a yummy steak dinner, enjoyed a bonfire on the beach and of course, we had a sauna. It served as a great reminder of all of the lessons that we learned at camp and that we still use today. Rip Ram!

MIKE ADAMSON
1979-1997



Left to right: Dan Hunter, Rick Parsons, Peter Taylor, Michael Roland, Tad McIlwraith, Michael Bain, Steve Cairns, Todd Houston, Mike Adamson, Scott Elmhirst Absent: Jamie Campbell, John Latimer



GROWING UP AT KILCOO CAMP

It was the day of the July 2013 Nor' Wester Iron Chef, a competition organized by our legendary section director, Olivier Sorin. In this event, each cabin prepared a meal over a campfire and presented it to a panel of judges. We were in Cabin 13, the oldest in the section, which always carried a certain level of pressure. However, the previous summer, we had been in Cabin 8.5 – the youngest in the section – and had achieved a spectacular underdog victory in Nor' Wester baseball, which gave us a boost of confidence.

The Iron Chef competition began in the morning and extended into lunch. As we started preparing our meal and presentation, it was a classically beautiful morning at Kilcoo. Then, partway through the competition, the sky turned and eerie green. If you had been standing at the waterfront in that moment, you would have witnessed an incredible wall of rain barreling toward the camp. As the storm struck Kilcoo, chaos erupted on an epic scale – rain, wind, sand, branches, and leaves all swirling in every direction. At this stage of the competition, our cabin mates were scattered across the camp: some prepared the meal at the woodcraft area, others gathered ingredients at the Lodge, and a few fetched supplies elsewhere. This dispersal created an unenviable situation for our counsellor Dave Rennick.

We sought shelter in the museum (the woodcraft cabin), the Rec Hut, and the ping pong room in the Lodge basement. Sheltering in the museum provided a baseline level of protection – four walls, a roof, and windows revealing swaying trees and the loud cracks of branches and trunks snapping. After a period of sheltering, the decision was made to consolidate the museum and rec hut groups into one location. Shortly afterward, everyone was instructed to relocate to our de facto bunker: the ping pong room.

As we ran from the rec hut to the lodge, the rain drove in from the lake sideways, sand pummeled us as it blew up from the beach, and strong winds continued to challenge the strength of the trees and ourselves. We could see the sailboats lifted in the air with only the dock tethers keeping them from flying away. At one point, a strong gale picked up a canoe from the canoe docks and launched it to the roof of Cabin 25. As trailblazer campers ran from their section to the Lodge, they were lifted off the ground because of the high winds. An incredible and epic storm had blown Kilcoo into chaos.

Once we reached the ping pong room, the immediate task was to find your counsellor and cabin mates. After everyone was accounted for, amidst the shivering and fear, our dad crafted a distraction in the form of a sing-song. As the storm raged outside, the spirit of Kilcoo prevailed, drowning out the

noise as we sang Sunshine Happiness, Titanic, Vreneli, the apt In the Wet, and of course the indelible You'll Never Walk Alone. What began as an uncertain moment transformed into one of a magnificent triumph of spirit.

This cherished memory embodies the ethos of resilience, character building, and camaraderie that define the Kilcoo experience. Every person who has participated carries their own special memories, and it is each of us preserving these individually that binds us as a collective, ensuring Kilcoo will endure forever.

We are fortunate that our Kilcoo memories began earlier than most. From birth, we spent our weekends and summers at the camp – what our friends would call a “cottage.” The difference was that we shared it with thousands of people from May to October each year. As young children, we didn't know any better, however this changed when we turned 7. In July 2008, we journeyed from the top of the hill to Cabin 1 for our first camp session – proudly, we were the only campers whose mode of transportation was marked as ‘on foot.’ From that moment, we joined the shared Kilcoo experience – understanding what the camp truly was – and found our closest friends, greatest role models, and most thoughtful mentors.

Anyone who has worked at Kilcoo knows that pre-camp is an important time for reconnecting with friends, making new ones, and preparing for the summer. Modern pre-camp includes many emergency procedure practices – the chapel water evac and the missing camper after the movie are always highlights – as well as numerous learning sessions. Staff and LITs become well-versed in the activity portfolio, hard and soft skills, and character-building. However, the week is primarily designed for the leadership group to feel comfortable: in their abilities, with each other, as leaders, and as contributors to this storied institution.



One particular pre-camp session remains notable for us. To celebrate Kilcoo's 90th year, an alumnus came and led a history session that included a talk, some artifacts, and a particular highlight for us – a videotape. It was a film series called Blue Lake & Rocky Shores, developed to celebrate Kilcoo's 75th summer. It was amazing to see the old footage of Kilcoo, but what made it truly special was hearing a recording of our late grandfather, John Latimer, giving his final speech as director and announcing his retirement. For everyone in the room, it was an interesting historical moment to listen to, but for us, it was the first time we heard his voice. We knew so much about the Chief (as he was fondly known), and were connected to him, through others – hearing stories about him, how people learned from him and were inspired by him. Listening to his speech, we felt connected to him anew, and more deeply connected to Kilcoo.

When Paul invited us to contribute a piece to the Gazette about our upbringing at the camp, we reflected on the cherished time we spent there – summers, weekends, holidays, KFPT, our unique pandemic summer, and much more. Notably however, all of our most cherished memories are from the collective Kilcoo experience of when camp was in session – with our best friends. Attached to all of these memories, however, is an immense sense of gratitude. More remarkable is how the camp connects us not only to our family's present and past but also the shared heritage of both. We are especially grateful for the publication of *Maker of Men: The Kilcoo Story*, which deepened our understanding of Kilcoo's history, our family's roots, the Chief's upbringing, and our grandparents' enduring partnership, among many other interesting stories. An added bonus was that we always seemed to have a competitive advantage for the Bushpede and Olympic scavenger hunts.

For us, Kilcoo has been a special place for our family for four generations, but what holds a deeper meaning is that it lives in the memories of all who have shared in its history. In a way, we all grew up Kilcoo: we learned so much here, met the most amazing people here, and we carry our most treasured memories from here. That is why Kilcoo will always endure. Kilcoo Forever, indeed.



T.J. LATIMER (2008-2023)
CHARLES LATIMER (2008-2023)

ALUMNI REMAINING CONNECTED

Once again this year, April Fool's Day saw a group of more than 20 alumni getting together for lunch to renew old friendships. Organized by alumnus Lindsay Ko with assistance from Craig Prentice and Ted Pease for at least the past 25 years it has been a good way of keeping the Kilcoo community connected.



Lindsay, Craig and Ted

I urge others among you to plan get togethers and report on them so I can include them in *The Gazette*. I had hoped to plan an alumni group visit to the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough this spring, but will have to put it off to October. If any of our readers would like to participate please let me know by e-mailing me at pchamp@sympatico.ca The cost runs between \$27 and \$38 (depending on age) a cost which provides a one hour guided tour plus unlimited time before or after to visit the exhibits. Sounds pricey, but it is well worth it!



Canoe Museum

SMOOTHIE GOLF TOURNAMENT

Following between 25 and 30 successful years, the Annual Smoothie Golf Tournament will be held again this year at Westview Golf and Country Club in Aurora, just off highway 404, on Thursday, June 11th. Tee times will begin at 11am and continue every 10 minutes until noon. The cost is \$90+hst for golf and cart, and a \$50 donation for AMICI. There is usually time for socializing after golf. This event is an excellent opportunity for alumni from different decades to meet one another and enjoy an afternoon of golf.

If you would like to play or need more information, please contact the organizer Randy Kline at randy.kline@cogeco.ca or 416-671-3441.

 **RANDY KLINE**
1964-77

REMEMBERING IAN BEARE (1956-1963)

I was saddened to hear that Ian Beare passed away March 29th. Ian first attended Kilcoo in 1956 and was followed a year later by Dave Milne with whom he had grown up as friends in Port Perry, Ontario. Dave has provided some detail about Ian we can offer here.

Ian started out as a camper in 1956 and worked his way through two years as a C.I.T. and then staff where he finished as water ski instructor in 1963. Dave recalls one time during post camp he and Ian were by themselves preparing dinner when Ian cut his hand quite badly. Instead of driving to Minden to get help they raided the infirmary and dressed the wound with everything they could find. Ian's father co-owned Beare Motors in Port Perry and one summer Ian brought a red sports car to camp with instructions from his father to sell the car which he did - to another staff member. Dave remembers Ian as a good athlete and I remember his smile and somewhat quiet unassuming sense of humour. Our condolences go out to Ian's wife Samantha.

 **PAUL CHAMBERLAIN**
DAVE MILNE
1957-64

We are pleased to share with you that **Geordie Knowles (2008-2016)** will not be attending the alumni reunion because he plans to be in Italy honeymooning with his bride. Congratulations, Geordie!

Amici's major fundraiser, **Canoe Heads**, was held Saturday, May 23rd and although alumni from many Ontario camps participate, we are very proud to say by far the largest group of participants are former Kilcoo staff - over 30 of them. Well done, Kilcoo!



DON'T MISS OUT ON THE REUNION

The Kilcoo office is an exciting place these days as registrations for the September reunion are flowing in.

DON'T MISS OUT BY PROCRASTINATING!

If you lost or discarded the registration form for the reunion or the form for the Friday afternoon golf send me an e-mail(pchamp@sympatico.ca) and I will send them to you. Both forms provide instructions for registration and payment.

Join us at Gull Lake in September to celebrate 95 years of Kilcoo Camp.

THE GAZETTE IS CALLING!

My file with articles for the fall issue of the Gull Rock Gazette is empty and needs your help!!

If you are coming to the September reunion don't say "No thank you" to the question, "Would you like to contribute to a future issue of the Gull Rock Gazette?" Articles are needed if we are to continue to have The Gazette to help keep our camp community connected. If you want help to get some ideas going please let me know at pchamp@sympatico.ca