

## Florence Island (originally known as Island 'F') \*

Florence Island was originally part of Francis Forge's land grant of the early 1870's.

Forge was born in Yorkshire, England in 1838, came to Canada in 1857, and then to Muskoka in the early 1860's. He acquired 100 acres of the land around Windermere in about 1871, (as did Thomas Aitken and David Fife).

As part of his grant, Forge was offered what is known now as, Wellesley Island (originally Island 'G'). He reportedly turned the offer down, unable to pay the taxes of what would have been about \$11 for Wellesley Island.

The Crown later sold **both** Wellesley Island (November 11, 1879) and Florence Island (November 19, 1879) to **James Edward Smith**, of Toronto for approximately \$180 (\$80 for Wellesley, \$100 for Florence). In 1879 James E. Smith sold 'Island F' to **William J Florence** for \$500. According to the land registry, William J. Florence sold the island in 1883 to Henry and Harry Logan for \$550.

James Edward Smith was mayor of Toronto from 1867 – 1869. Wellesley Island is still owned by a descendent of his family, Selby Martin.

An ad found in a 1888 publication advertises the entire Florence Island, with 'a good house on it' - "For Sale" ....no price listed.

Not much seems to be known on why 'Billy' Florence, an American actor, songwriter and playwright, co-founder of the Shriners, ended up buying an island in Muskoka. That will most likely remain a mystery, but one can guess it was the reason we all like to be here.... It is speculated that he built the first cottage on the island, the iconic red roofed structure with 'Florence Island' painted below it. It could also have been built by Henry and Harry Logan, as they owned it from 1883 until 1889. Maps of 1886 identify the building.

The entire island with building was purchased in 1889 by **Charles H Nelson** for \$400 (that might have been the only time there has ever been a dip in real estate prices in Muskoka!). Nelson subdivided Florence Island into the 19 lots we see on the map below.

In 1890 Florence Island was sold to **Robert Heber Bowes** (a Toronto barrister – Smith, Wood and Bowes) for \$2000. It sold again one year later, in 1891, for \$1, to **John Payne** (wondering if this was payment of a debt??).

According to Wellesley Island owner, Selby Martin, there has always been a rumour that Florence Island was 'lost' in a high stakes poker game....could this have been it?

In 1899 John Payne sold the entire island and building to **George Robert Baker** for \$2000.

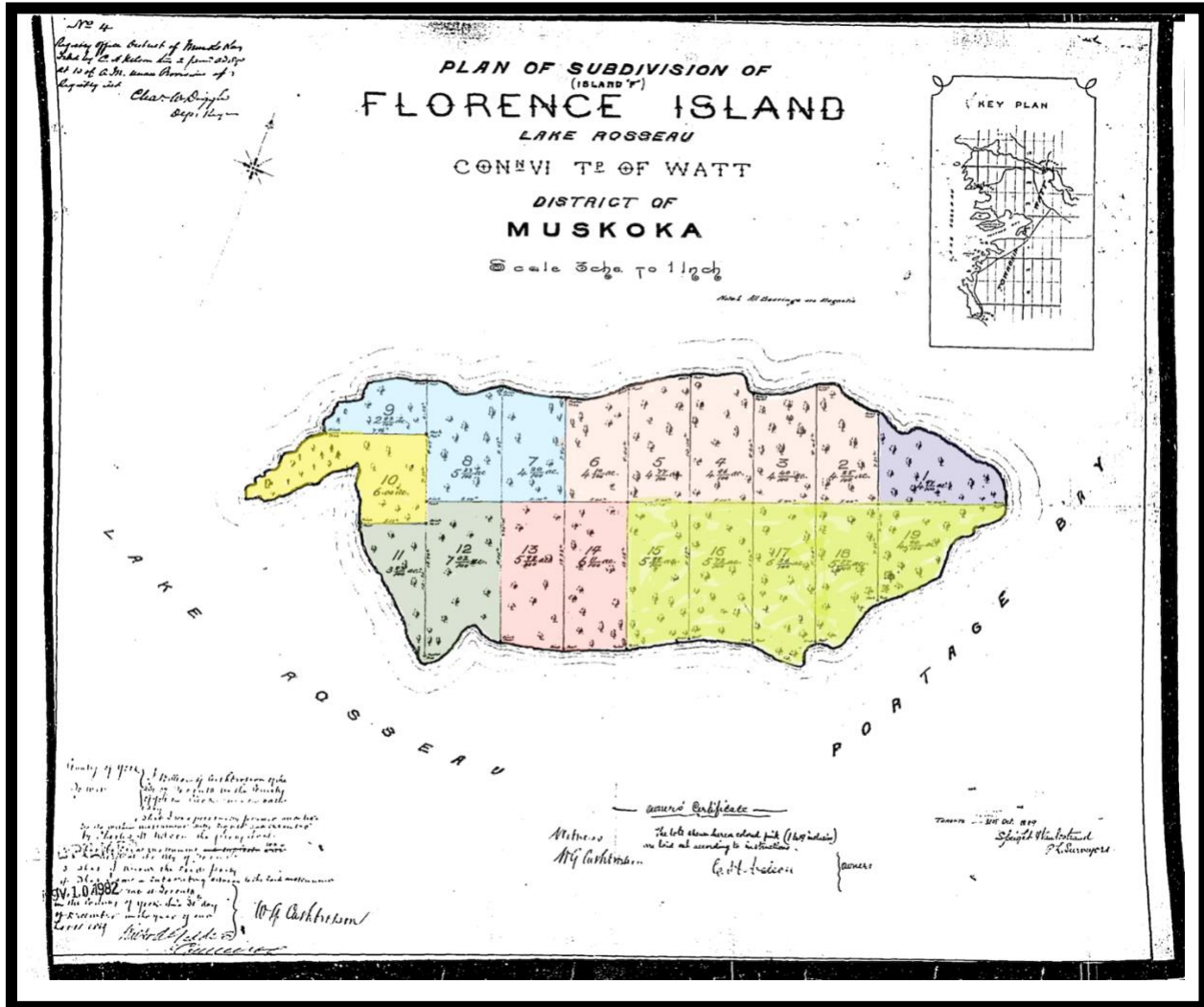
The island's 19 lots remained in George Baker's hands in their entirety until 1905 when he began to sell off lots and parcels of land to individuals every few years. Baker died in 1921. The last of his property on Florence Island was sold in 1925, by his widow, Alice Lloyd Harvey. These distributions are shown in The pages below (colour map and notes)








George Robert Baker was an engineer and machinist. He started a business in 1874 with James Henry Westman, manufacturing printing, cutting and book binding machines, for distribution across Canada. Baker was a canoe enthusiast, Commodore for the Toronto Canoe Club 1892 – 1893. The Toronto Canoe Club was very active here in Muskoka. Research also reveals that George Robert Baker was related to the Alfred Baker (1848 – 1942) - Ishkaugua Island – (and Baker Shoal on your map), a noted mathematician at U of T and president of the Royal Society of Canada. He was also related to Richard Langton Baker, MP for several years in the 1930's. R. L. Baker owned Silver Island and it is still in that family. Another member of the Baker family at one time also owned Alfreda and Euphemia Islands on Lake Rosseau.

### Additional notes of interest.

- 1 - Electricity came to the island in 1946.
- 2 - The longest property ownership to date here on Florence Island is held by the Burton family who have been on Florence Island first as renters, from about 1926 to 1928, and then with the purchase of their property in 1929 – in their family since that time. (see additional notes below)
- 3 - Biographical notes on past owners (if known) are included in text boxes, based on my research, and not necessarily absolute or complete.

The map below shows the 19 lots created by C H Nelson in 1889. Each colour represents the parcels and lots sold off by George R. Baker over a 20 year time period. The colour code below the map indicates the year each parcel was sold. These sales and subsequent sales of lots and parcels are colour coded as well. S **Current owners/family are indicated in BOLD.**



	1905		1909		1921
	1906		1919		1924
					1925

## 1905

### Lots 7, 8, 9

- sold to Clarence M. Coddington
  - 1910 – these lots were sold to John Wm. Edwards and George Henry Edwards
    - rented to the Burton family from 1926 – 1928).
  - 1929 – same lots sold to Charles Luther Burton
  - 1958 – same lots sold to George Allan Burton
  - 1974 – same lots sold to **Charles Merrill Burton**

The original Burton cottage, assumed to have been built by either the Coddingtons or the Edward brothers sometime between 1905 and 1912 was an old farmhouse to which was added "a great room" with a minstrel's gallery. It stood 25 feet high and dwarfed the rest of the cottage. The room was very dark and required 45 light bulbs to light it. A moose head adorned one wall and an elk head on another.

### Lot 7

- 1998 – sold to Colleen and Dell Jeffrey
- 2007 – sold to **Jodie and Brent Cator**

### Lot 8 & 9

- 2021 – sold to **Jodie and Brent Cator**

**It is speculated that George Robert Baker built the PINES (Lots 11 & 12) around 1899 although there are no records of this. It was a secondary cottage to the original on the point built in the late 1870's or early 1880's.**

**In 1906** Baker sold 11 & 12 to - Benjamin F. Barber and Elizabeth W Barber – they may have named it Pine Point (sold for \$2750

- 1910 – Sold to Col. Henry Campbell Osborne and Marian Georgina Osborne of Toronto (\$2750)  
(The 2 storey boathouse was 'supposedly' built in the 1920's to house the launch and for accommodation for the maids)
- 1932 – Sold to Florence Proctor and Albert H C Proctor (\$6000)
- 1944 – Sold to Harry O'Perry (\$7000) (part of lot 11 was sold to George Kingman in 1946 for \$800). This was purchased back by the Langs in 2011.
- 1947 – Sold to Henry and Anne Mikulka (\$8000)
- 1948 – Sold to Richard Anson Barber and Emma Ruth Barber (\$10,000)
- 1974 – property transferred to Ruth E. Grimshaw and eventually to her 4 boys, Richard, William, Robert and David.
- 1999 – Sold to **Donald and Karen Lang**

Colonel Henry Campbell Osborne (1874-1949), was a distinguished lawyer, stockbroker and military man, who became Secretary General for Canada on the Imperial War Graves Commission. His wife, Marian Georgina was related through her mother's family to the Oslers of the Windermere area. She was a published author of poems and verse and considered to be a talented athlete – noted specifically in fencing and ornamental swimming.

Albert H. C. Proctor (1878 – 1955), was in real-estate and insurance. His wife, Florence Evelyn Kemp was a recognized Canadian Artist. Her father, Albert Edward Kemp was an MP in Toronto East, elected 5x to the House of Commons and appointed senator in 1921.

'Supposedly' the Pines was sold 'sight unseen' in 1947 to the Mikulkas from Britain, who, after visiting it to determine its viability as a Bed and Breakfast, decided it 'would not do', and promptly sold it a year later for a tidy profit.

## 1909

### Lots 13, 14

- Sold to – John William Edwards and George H Edwards for \$450 each
- 1910 – Sold to Henry Charles Osborne and Marian Georgina Osborne for \$1100 each
- 1932 – Sold to Florence Proctor and Albert H C Proctor
- 1944 – Sold to Harry O'Perry
- 1947 – Sold to Henry and Anne Mikulka
- 1948 – Sold to Richard Anson Barber and Emma Ruth Barber
- 1974 – property transferred to Ruth E. Grimshaw and eventually to her 4 boys, Richard, William, Robert and David
- 1999 – Sold to **Donald and Karen Lang**

## 1919

### Lots 15, 16, 17, 18, 19

- Sold to William Henry Brain (\$1250)
- 1935 – deeded to Helen Mary Sugden (daughter of Ethel Mary Brain, widow of Wm. H. Brain)
- 1974 – sold from the estate of H. M. Sugden to **George S. Niblett**

### Lot 17

- 1998 – sold to **Pam and Newell Kraik**

### Lot 18

- 1987 – sold to Bette and Edward Martin
- 1999 – sold to **Nancy and Chuck Plews**

### Lot 19

- 1987 – sold to Bette and Edward Martin
- 2002 – sold to the **Rubinoffs**

William Henry Brain came from Cardiff, Wales. He was chairman of S. A. Brain & Co. Ltd, a brewery started by his family and still in operation today. William was an avid Cricketer, playing for Oxford University in the 1890's. His connection to Muskoka came via Henry C. Osborne, who owned Lots 11, 12, 13 and 14 from 1909. Brain died in 1934, and the cottage/boathouse was left in his estate to his daughter, Helen Mary Sugden. His sons received his shares in a Quebec Fishing and Game Club. There is a story that Helen was murdered by her daughter, Mary Susan, but I could find no facts to substantiate that.

## 1921

### Lot 1

- Sold to Edward Henry French and his daughter, Elizabeth Lillian French
- 1969 – title transferred to Elizabeth French and Ivie Irene Bacon and her husband Norman Albert Bacon
- 1981 – title transferred to the Bacons from the estate of Elizabeth French
- 1983 – a small section of Lot 1 (60 feet of frontage) was sold to John and Marcia Shortreed
- 1983 – French cottage and bulk of Lot 1 sold to **Donald Mathews and Iain Miller**

## 1924

- Lot 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
- Sold by the estate of George R Baker to the Great West Realty Company – (\$1000)
- there is reference to a premises being somewhere on this group of lots
- 1935 – sold to Lake Securities Limited (Osler family?)

### Lot 2

- 1954 - Lake Securities sold to Frederick Allen Hill and Margaret Hill
- 1981 – sold a portion to John and Marcia Shortreed
- 1993 – sold a portion to Hill Family (Peter, Daniel, Charles)
- 2010 – sold to Pippa and Charles Hill

### Lot 3

- 1954 – easterly half of the lot sold to Frederick Allen Hill and Margaret Hill
- 1954 - westerly half sold to Pickton Securities Ltd
- 1969 –sold to Osler family (Britton Michael, John Gwyn and Campbell Revere Osler – executors of the estate of Marion Pickton Osler)
- 1971 – sold to Alice Leone Robertson
- 1976 – sold to Stanwill Holdings (real estate company)
- 1988 – sold to Philip Alan Richardson
- **1999 – sold to Brian McComb and Harriet Thomas**

**Lot 4**

- 1954 - sold to Pickton Securities Ltd
- 1969 –sold to Osler family (Britton Michael, John Gwyn and Campbell Revere Osler executors of the estate of Marion Pickton Osler)
- 1971 – sold to Alice Leone Robertson
- 1976 – sold to Stanwill Holdings (real estate company)
- 1986 – sold to **Frederick Rush and family**

**Lot 5**

- 1954 - sold to Pickton Securities Ltd
- 1969 –sold to Osler family (Britton Michael, John Gwyn and Campbell Revere Osler – executors of the estate of Marion Pickton Osler)
- 1971 – sold to Alice Leone Robertson
- 1976 – sold to Stanwill Holdings (real estate company)
- 1985 – sold to Anne-Marie Bernadette Barnard
- 1987 – sold to Judith Margaret Peacock
- 1996 – sold to **Jodie and Brent Cator**

**Lot 6**

- 1954 - sold to Pickton Securities Ltd
- 1969 –sold to Osler family (Britton Michael, John Gwyn and Campbell Revere Osler, executors of the estate of Marion Pickton Osler)
- 1971 – sold to Alice Leone Robertson
- 1976 – sold to Stanwill Holdings (real estate company)
- 1987 – sold to Neil Andrew Paton
- 1988 – sold to Colleen and Dell Jeffrey
- 2007 – sold to **Jodie and Brent Cator**

**1925**

- sold to Anna T. Griffin from the estate of George Robert Baker
- 1935 – sold to George Kingman
- 1966 – transferred to **Donald and Lorraine Kingman (now Michelle Kingman)**

36—"Highcliffe," Florence Island, Lake Rosseau. East side of Windermere. 6 acres about cottage. Furnished house, containing living room; four double bedrooms; kitchen; store-room; launch-house with upstairs for four people; sail-boat 16 feet; one row-boat; steam boat wharf; and boat-house.

Sale price \$7,500.00.

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History and heritage is an ongoing investigation and evolution.

My research was not able to find all the facts and details that I would have liked. I have tried to give a 'reasonably' accurate overview, although there may be some errors.

Dates and owners of the various properties were often different than I originally thought.

You may know more about some of these prior owners and buildings. If you have additional notes, feel free to share.

It was, and still is, a puzzle of fascinating proportions.

You can add your own continuing story to your cottage ownership for future generations.

