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DISPRO OWNERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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Photo: Pau Jenner

Jeff Hill and Gary Campaigne are probably discussing the conditions out there on Lake Couchiching as Jeff prepares to set off. A few brave souls ventured out into the wind blown waters at the September annual regatta held at the Fern Resort.



President's Letter • December 2024

Dear Members,

Another season has come and gone. It went by so quickly. As I write this I'm watching Muskoka dig out of a major early season snow storm. Road closures and wide spread power outages make me thankful for a successful summer, both on and off the water. The club had a full slate of events this summer with three UUMMTs and the Regatta on Lake Couchiching in September.

The weather was not our friend at the Regatta this year which made for a memorable regatta, just not for the boating. Although the boating was limited, everyone in attendance seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves, which once again proves the strength of the club is in the members and time spent together in and around these wonderful little boats. There are too many people to thank for all the help in planning and running the events, but I do want to thank Eric and Cynthia Luks for being amazing hosts for the August UUMMT.

We are in the planning stages for 2025 and expect to again be able to offer a number of tremendous experiences for everyone. AGM, UUMMTs and Regatta planning is well underway and we're excited about the proposed locations. Stay tuned for details in the next Device. 2025 is also a workshop year so we will be organizing a workshop for the fall of 2025. It will be a full calendar in 2025.

Snowy days like today are a great time to go over the winter plans for your boat. I like spending the winter planning on what needs to be done on the boat the following spring to ensure a summer of trouble-free boating. There are a great number of resources out there to assist in locating special parts or to provide guidance on how to tackle your next project.

I wish everyone health and happiness over the winter and look forward to seeing everyone at the AGM in April.

See you on the water.

Jim



Photo: Mary Storey

Paul Dodington, alias Uncle Billy Wagtail, enjoying the morning cruise on the way to the celebration for the 100th anniversary of the Johnston House.



Remembering Robert Clipsham

The following is an excerpt from my eulogy given at Robert Clipsham's memorial service this past summer.

While on vacation this summer in Montreal, Barb and I were sitting on a curb on Mount Royal waiting to catch the Hop On, Hop Off bus when my phone rang. It was Pamela and we instinctively knew that it might not be good news. It wasn't. I remember saying to Barb as we wiped away tears, "We've lost a good one" and indeed we had. Only three days earlier I had spoken with Robert and had felt positive for a recovery, as he sounded much stronger. It was not to be.

If my memory serves me correctly, I believe my first meeting with Robert and Pamela was at an Antique and Classic Boat Show in Peterborough. Robert and I got to know each other better through the years as we each took our stints on the executive of the Dispro club.

Although of course we met in person at boating events, our friendship was unique in that it was mainly via the telephone. Robert would call from a "plane " meeting in Europe, a beach in Florida, on his way to or from a visit to the office, coming from a client or driving to a surveyor's convention. Often, yes very often, it was when he was in the car and often I was also in our car. I, in turn, frequently called to check in with him. Our conversations centered around mutual problems, matters of the Dispro club, beaver fever and yes, even squirrels in garages. His reports on how sick he had been with beaver fever, prompted us to put in an additional filtration system at our cottage. Another call that comes to mind, was at the beginning of Covid. The Prime Minister had announced that all Canadians out of the country should, "come home now". I immediately spoke with Robert who was on a beach in Florida. With this news, he and Pamela re-booked their flight and came home.

I remember when fellow club member, Mike Windsor, called me in desperation, trying to find a member to fill a vacant position on the executive. I immediately thought of Robert and called him at home. Pamela answered and after some discussion she suggested that Robert might be interested in sharing the job with me. Robert agreed and this was the start of our path to co-presidency.

During our time together on the board we both dealt with significant health issues. It was wonderful to know that if one of us was struggling, the other was there as a support and to keep things going. Robert was a wonderful co-president of the Dispro club. He was a thoughtful, calm leader and a great listener. He excelled in organizational and structural procedures and simplified our method for taking executive meeting minutes. He also had a mastery of "Robert's rules", like no one else! Above all, he was appreciative of the time, effort and work put forth by others and was most generous with the simple, but powerful words, "thank you".

In conclusion, thank you Robert for being such a gentleman and friend. As you frequently said, "We need to get boats in the water" and we will, in your memory.

Ian Dickson



Remembering Whitey Smale

One of my first customers was Whitey Smale. It was supposed to be a keel and a couple of planks in his boat "Old Poke". Over the following years there were several more boats and much bigger projects.

Turns out that we went to the same high school in different decades, and both began our boating obsession on Lake Belwood near Fergus. When Whitey had a boat in my shop he'd be in my driveway first thing on his day off, raring to go, putting plugs in the planks I'd fastened or doing whatever needed to be done.

I remember taking Whitey out in my 1926 Model T for a ride, and he said that he'd like to get an old car. I suggested that perhaps a Model A would suit him better than a slowpoke Model T. He went on to get several old cars and dove into the old car hobby with the same vigorous enthusiasm that he had for old boats.

I'm glad that I got to spend an afternoon with him this summer at the ACBS boating event at Port Severn. I was saddened to hear of Whiteys passing with his wife Kathy on Monday in their 1937 Buick on an old car tour near Owen Sound. Whitey truly did live until the day he left this world. I don't think he would have done very well at being sick. RIP Whitey and Kathy.

Mike Windsor



The Old Johnston House in Port Carling: Built 1924

100th Anniversary Celebration August 24, 2024

William J. Johnston Jr. owned the Port Carling property above the Indian River where his Dispro factory was located. Here he built a splendid brick home for his new bride Mae Sands.

The Johnston House at 95 Joseph Street in Port Carling was built 100 years ago in 1924. To celebrate this event, the present owners and Dispro members, Cynthia and Eric Luks invited the Dispro Owners Association to celebrate at their house on August 24th. Fifty people attended.



Photo: Mary Storey

Members who trailered their boats to the event launched their Dispros at Hanna Park in the village of Port Carling. They were joined on the river by those who boated to the event. We travelled through the locks to Lake Rosseau where we were met by Tom Wood who handed each boater a folder with charts and information about the cottages and history of this area of the lake.

The morning was spent boating among the islands on the southern end of Lake

Some came by dippy and enjoyed the morning cruise.





Eric's new sign at the site of the Dispro factory.

Rosseau. Glorious sunshine and calm waters made for an excellent trip. Upon returning through the locks and cruising a short distance down the river, we all viewed the new waterfront sign installed by Eric marking the historic site of the Dispro factory. The Dispros were tied up at docks and we climbed the hill up to the Luk's house for a wonderful celebration.

Tours of the house were offered before and after the plentiful and delicious lunch served by the Luks family. Several people arrived in period costume. Whites, boater's hats, and suspenders were the clothing of the day.



The colourful cast of characters in attendance provided a very entertaining question and answer session moderated by Cynthia Luks.

With Cynthia Luks as moderator, Mae Johnston (Sheila Burk) and Billy Johnston Jr. (Bob Burk) as well as Uncle Billy Wagtail (Paul Dodington) were asked several questions about their past life, their business of building Dispros and the early days of the Port Carling area. The responses were hilarious, a half hour of laughs.

The Dispro club is indebted to the Luks family for hosting and marking the centennial celebration of the Johnston house.

John and Mary Storey





Photo: Paul Jenner

The beautiful back garden provided a wonderful setting for the festivities.



Photo: Mary Storey

The Old Johnston House in Port Carling: Built 1924

The Story of the House

The year 2024 would also have been the 100th Wedding Anniversary of William (Billy) James Johnston (1881-1968) and Mae (Mary) C. Sands (1885-1982).

Mae, named after her mother Mary (n.James) (m.Colin Sands d.1890) McCulley, was 38 at that time and Billy was 43. Garth Tassie drove them to Orillia in his car to be married quietly, perhaps due to the fact that they were first cousins and there existed a potential for disapproval in the small town.



Photos: The Lukes

Above, Billy Johnston at the helm of a sailboat and right, Mae Sands on the far right with her sister Annett in the middle.



As the story goes, Mae's stepfather, Capt. James J. McCulley agreed to allow his daughter to marry Billy as long as he built her a house. And indeed he did. A wonderful

red brick veneer house with picturesque gables on all sides looking out over the Indian River in three directions. The house includes all kinds of unusual features inside and out. Whoever was the designer/architect remains a mystery yet but to be solved.

The land on the west side of Joseph Street which runs through Port Carling from the Presbyterian Church north to the river and locks entrance was owned by the Johnston family. Billy's uncle, Wm.J.Johnston Sr., (a.k.a. Uncle Billy Wagtail) had his home (built by his father, pioneer Benjamin Hardcastle Johnston) and boatbuilding workshop on the northern lower part of the property. He built rowboats and sailboats and had a business on the north side of the locks, renting these pleasure craft to tourists during the summer. He employed his nephew "Young Billy" to run a similar boat rental at Port Sandfield. In the winter they worked together building boats and sometime later Wm.Sr. took Wm.Jr. in as a full partner.

Around 1914, Billy developed the disappearing propeller device, refined it, built suitable boats and then built a factory to produce these innovative watercraft on the Indian River just south of his uncle's place. Business flourished, employing 20 people, and by 1924 Billy could afford to build a wonderful house for Mae.

continued . . .





The unusual features of the house include a beautiful three storey wooden staircase up to the third floor ending in a large trap door. Perhaps Billy brought home a piece of cypress from the factory every night in his lunchpail? There are eight principal rooms with 10 foot ceilings, birch floors throughout, and wonderful woodwork around doors and windows. French doors enter the living room at each end with amazing arched lights above

that must have been steamed into shape at the factory on the river. Mae stored her fur coat and woollens in the log storage cupboards on either side of the stone fireplace in the summer. These opened to the outside to allow wood to be easily stored for the fire during the winter. Bathrooms were few, only two, with many people sharing and bedroom cupboards were largely absent. No doubt they had fewer clothes to store. A trap door in the kitchen led down to a laundry and access to the furnace in the winter. During that season, Mae carried the wash all the way up to the third floor to hang in the attic. This brave, strong and refined lady who loved gardening proved to be a great asset to Billy, who was reported to be a quiet and unassuming gentleman.

Unfortunately that same year of 1924, certain irregularities were discovered in the operations of the D.P. Boats Company. Not long after this, the factory was closed and the steam heat from the factory used to heat the radiators in the house was no longer available. A passage on the south side of the house was dug out and a half basement created to accommodate a furnace. The other half sits on a huge rock foundation preventing any further excavation.

Billy, along with several other D.P. employees, formed a new company, the Port Carling Boatworks. Billy was fully involved for several years but then returned to the Dispro factory and built launches under the name of W.J. Johnston Boatworksa sign was erected next to the road. Also at one time there was a glass case out front on the lawn displaying a rowboat and his fine workmanship.

Suddenly in 1924, finding themselves in reduced circumstances, Mae and Billy decided to take in lodgers. A second door was opened in to the kitchen, and the dining room made into a bedroom, with a bathroom between the kitchen and dining room. The original back door led to the staircase and lodgers' quarters upstairs. A summer bedroom and bathroom on one end of the front porch was often used by one of Mae's nieces. According to Vicki and Doug Bassett, great great niece and nephew of Mae's, there was a large moose head in the living room (Billy's hunting prize) and a chest full of shells from Florida on the front porch.

Dr. and Mrs. Archdekin, newly married and settling in Port Carling, occupied the master bedroom upstairs at the front of the house for a time.

When Billy's mother Ismay Johnston (n. James) died, Billy's older brother Robert moved in with them and was installed on the third floor. It was necessary to lift the full sized trap door to access that large space. Mae was known to fondly call Billy and Robert her two men. Robert died in 1967 at age 87 and Bill a year later in 1968 aged 88. It must have been a very sad time for Mae. Fortunately her sister Annett lived on the other side of the Presbyterian Church with her husband and daughter Charlotte. Mae had many other

nieces and nephews in town as well, including Douglas McCulley who travelled with the couple to Florida in later years. Hence the term “Auntie Mae” was used widely in Port Carling and that name now graces the prow of a Dippy built in 1924 at the factory. This Dippy was located in Schreiber, Ontario and has returned full circle to its birthplace. Her story will be told in a future edition of the Device.



Photo: The Luks

Mae on the left, Billy behind the wheel and at the back a young Douglas McCulley.

Mae and Billy appear to have led happy but eventful lives in their charming house on the hill, set well back from Joseph Street, the main road through town, and backing on the river.

Several artifacts will stay with the house always. A section of Billy's workbench from his old garage is built in to the current owner's workbench as a tribute to Billy's many boatbuilding achievements. The two small black recipe books belonging to Mae and her mother Mary – mostly desserts, will remain. Also a small discoloured box from Ellis Bros. Jewellers (now Birks), which had been mailed to Miss W. Johnston, which we fervently hope, contained her wedding ring.

Tours available on request.

Cynthia Luks

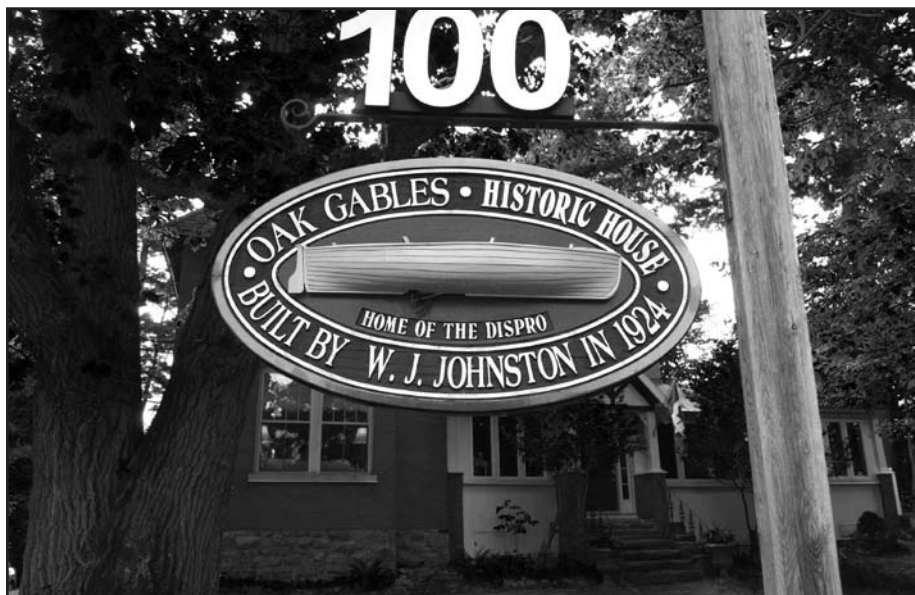


Photo: Paul Jenner





The 2024 Dispro Regatta was a little different than many of the previous ones. It had all to do with weather.

The club members gathered at Fern Resort on lake Couchiching near Orillia on Friday September 6th in bright sunny weather. A warm welcome went out to several members from south of the border as we discussed the weather forecast for the weekend. Participants were busy placing their auction items in the special room set aside for that purpose, and viewing the many facilities the resort offered. Dinner on the first evening was just the teaser for the varied menus, great service and ambiance of the dining room.



Photo: Paul Jenner

Yes, the skies were grey on Friday, but Saturday morning brought rain, and lots of it. Sixteen boats arrived at the resort, but nine spent the weekend on their trailers as owners thought that Lake Couchiching might not be a safe place to be, with high winds and pelting rain. A few brave souls did venture out but are probably still drying out their clothes! Sunday morning found a couple more boats on the water for a short time.

The auction was a huge success raising over \$2000. We wonder what Eric Luks will do with all those copper nails, what?

It was deceptively calm in the lagoon where a few boat were tied up but out on Lake Couchiching the winds were howling and you were going to get wet.





Despite the adverse weather conditions outside, everyone inside enjoyed the excellent food at the Fern Resort and the opportunity to do more socialising.

Not the greatest weekend for boating but, a great resort. A shout out to the Fern Resort. Fabulous food, activities and lovely accommodations. The auction is always a fun night and raised a good sum of money for the club. But you can't put a price on the friendship and socializing at the regatta. It's great to catch up with old friends, share stories, have a laugh and maybe a few tears.

Many thanks to DOA president Jim Butler and his wife Holley for a well-planned weekend.

Mary Storey



The launching and retrieval of boats was a team effort as the windy conditions, choppy water and a somewhat unstable, and less than floating dock, made things difficult for those who dared.





Photo: Paul Jenner

Cool, calm and collected, Jeff Hill is ready for the off at this year's regatta. What's a little rain and rough water for a diehard dipper? I went out with Jeff and it was quite an exciting ride. And yes we did get a little wet but that's all part of the experience. Dippy owners are a hardy bunch!

Paul Jenner



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