

CLARKE-DENSON COTTAGE – “ROSSMORE”

This cottage was built around 1934 by Dr. Harold Clarke. Harold was born in 1891 in Toronto, the son of Isaac Nathan Clarke, a carpenter/builder and his wife Mary Ann, both originally from Newfoundland. Harold studied medicine at the University of Toronto and graduated in 1914. In December 1916 he enlisted in the Canadian Army Medical Corps and served as a captain until September 1919. On January 30 1918 Captain Clarke married Sarah Kathleen (Kay) Liddle whose family farmed in Grimsby, Ontario. They had two sons – Frederick Robson (1919-1998) and Gerald Hugh (1925-2009).



Clarke-Denson Cottage in the early years



Harold and Kay Clarke

In February 1920 Dr. Clarke and his wife came to Brighton where he had a practice on Young Street, and then from 1926-1948 at 82 Main. His medical practice was sold in 1948.

The cottage “Rossmore” was built of BC fir. The layout was designed by Dr. Clarke and was similar to the neighbours’ prefabricated cottages. Some of the people who worked on the construction did so in lieu of their medical bills. Dr. Clarke died in February 1953 in Trenton Memorial Hospital having been in poor health for the previous four years. He was a Past Master of the Masonic Lodge in Brighton, a member of the Ontario Medical Association, a past president of the Northumberland and Durham Medical Society, a member of the Lions Club and Canadian Legion, and a member and Warden of St. Paul’s Church in Brighton.

On January 17, 1961 in Toronto, Dr. Clarke’s widow Kay married Lester Denson, a widower. Lester Denson was born in 1895 in Connecticut and owned a jewelry business in Greenwich. In 1919 he had married Gladys Atkins, an aunt of the late Harold Atkins; she died in 1959. The Densons had one daughter Dorothy, born in 1920, who then married W. Dudley Hill Jr. The Densons rented #22 Bayshore “Mayfair” and usually came to Presqu’ile sometime in the summer. Lester Denson died in December 1966.

When properties were taken over by the Park in 1956, Kay was given a life lease. When Kay Denson died in 1985 the cottage was then taken over by the park and used as the office for Natural Heritage Education (NHE) staff until 2013. During the park years it was known as the Denson cottage. With its reincarnation as a rental unit in 2015, the name Clarke, in honour of the original builder, was added to the cottage name. Much of the hardware in the cottage is original, as well as the kitchen sink and bath sink. The grandchildren remember the many happy times they spent in Presqu’ile.

Kay Denson was buried next to her husband Harold Clarke in Mount Hope Cemetery.

From research carried out by Joan Selwood for Parks Ontario and Friends of Presqu’ile. Photo of the Clarkes courtesy of the family; photo of the cottage courtesy of Ontario Parks.