

# Fletcher family spent '20s in Pukaskwa area

NOREEN TOWERS

How would you like a Christmas dinner of bannock and winter radish?

That was the Yuletide menu for G. Learmont Fletcher, December 25, 1934, and the banquet table was one of Lake Superior's icy cobblestone beaches. Bad weather had forced them to beach their craft for refuelling.

Lee Fletcher addressed Sault Naturalists in the Library Centennial Room Tuesday evening. The speaker is woods superintendent of Abitibi Paper Company, and his subject was the Pukaskwa district.

Mr. Fletcher's association with the wilderness began as a child of four. The family, father, mother and two small sons, arrived at the Pukaskwa River site of the Lake Superior Paper Co., a subsidiary of the Spanish River Paper Co., in 1920. Mr. Fletcher Sr. was depot clerk attending to payroll and accounting.

During the peak years 200-300 residents were in the area. The children were educated by correspondence courses. In those days children started to read early. Dr. Hamill, now of Blind River, was the general practitioner. The camp closed in 1930 because of the depression.

The Pukaskwa National Park has an area of 500 square miles on the northeast shoulder of Lake Superior. There are about 100 miles of vacant shoreline. At point Isacor, the bluff rises abruptly 400-500 feet. Further inland Tip Top Mountain, rising 2,100 feet, dominates the area.

A trapper, Gus Weidmar, climbed the height in 1924. The feat took him two days, but he considered the spectacular vista worth the effort. A Hydro road is the nearest access point to the mountain.

The Pukaskwa is the largest of several rivers in the area,

and offers the only way into the hinterland.

A sand bar at the river mouth results in a lagoon that affords excellent fishing. Mr. Fletcher recalls the rainbow, lake trout and coasters that were in abundance. There is an excellent harbor.

The speaker reminisces about the icy waters of Imogene Creek. His father had a theory that if a swimmer plunged into the Imogene first, the waters of Superior would seem warm by comparison.

He had fond memories of an accident-prone clinker-built boat that had a tendency to sink when left unattended. On a trip to Sault Ste. Marie, they ran aground at Moore's Point. The lack of running lights caused some concern. To be mistaken for a rum runner had certain inconveniences.

A. Y. Jackson's Bear Cabin is a painting of the remaining cabin at the site.

Supplies were brought in by boat into the depot. It was a sad day when the last supply boat left in the fall, and a stampede greeted the first arrival in the spring.

One year, some pranksters built a tarpaper fire on an off shore island. The residents, on sighting the smoke thought the first boat had arrived.

Mail was brought in by dog team 75 miles from White River about every ten days. The mail carriers had two dog teams, and the trip took roughly five days.

After the depot closed, moose became more numerous. In March of 1933, Mr. Fletcher recalled a walk from Pukaskwa to Michipicoten Harbor, many miles of which were over glare ice. One of the two caribou herds he observed while in the area was spotted at Dog Harbor.

During those years, much of the travel was done by small craft. Because of the respect

the residents had for Lake Superior, few got into serious trouble. Travellers would pull up on shore and sit out the bad weather.

There were wolves, foxes and kangaroo mice. Ground hogs found their way to this unlikely spot. They are usually found in agricultural land.

There is a story behind the naming of Homer and Byron townships. The government offered \$25,000 as an incentive for the discovery of tin. Homer Penney deposited some tin in the area, and spread the word of the discovery. A geologist, even though he was ill, realized the ore had originated in Wales.

The MacDougal brothers found magnetite ore in 1900. Dr. Bell, a geologist, after inspecting the site, continued on down the river, and met the Pukaskwa family. During his time there, the Indian mother died. The remainder of the family perished on a trip to Michipicoten Island. The Indians travelled there to tap a stand of maple trees on the island.

Frank Perry of the Michigan Sault landed in 1904 and did some farming. He timbered the white pine, but in 1907 lost his log booms because of bad weather conditions. The result of this was bankruptcy for him. Mile 148 of the ACR is named for him.

Pulp was originally cut in 16 foot lengths. It was later reduced to four foot lengths because it was difficult to run in the rivers.

The Clergue era sparked a rash of prospecting. In 1954 Hollinger surveyed and staked claims. Mr. Fletcher staked 27 claims in the same area.

Many oldtimers claim that those years were the best years of their lives. Perhaps time dims the loneliness, isolation and the cold. . . But as Mr. Fletcher stated, "I have the wilderness in my blood."