

BAKER'S POINT since 1915

Submitted by Jane Baker Stott, a member of the Big Rideau Association



In 1915 Frederick Morgan Baker, my great, great Uncle Fred, had the Baker cottage built for his young wife Emily Cockfield. Her family cottage was directly across the Big Rideau Lake, behind Star Island. She wanted the exact replica built on the eastern shore to enjoy the glorious sunset view.

Uncle Fred was born in Perth, Ontario. His mother, Harriet Theophila was the eldest daughter of Daniel McMartin Esq. Barrister of Perth. Uncle Fred's father, John Frederick Baker, had moved to Canada from London as an associate with the Royal School of Mines. As a young man Uncle Fred worked in Ottawa as Sir John Pope's Private Secretary, the Minister of Agriculture, Railways and Canals.

Uncle Fred and Emily had four children but sadly only their last child, Allan, reached adulthood. Alan was said to have found it a very lonely existence in the summers at the lake, perhaps because he was an only child with few nearby playmates. In 1935 when his parents died, Alan Baker sold the cottage to my grandfather, Arthur Grantham Baker.

Arthur Grantham came over to Canada in 1910, and after working with the Ottawa Navigation Company for several years found a position with the Bell Telephone Company. His fiancé, Maude Ewart Sadler, arrived from England on October 21, 1910. They were married the following day, and their wedding reception was held at Uncle Fred's home in Ottawa.

My mother and father, Shirley, and Doug Baker, had their honeymoon on the property in August of 1939. My mother remembered hearing the news that war was declared on the radio while at the lake. She also remembered a provisions boat bringing grocery orders to a dock at Star Island where we would pick them up. Following a family tradition, my sister and her husband also honeymooned here in August of 1976, and my daughter was married on the lakeside lookout in front of the cottage in June of 2001.

As a young child in the mid 1950s I remember driving in on the last bit of farm road and coming to several gates. My dad would stop the car, and one of us kids would open and close each swinging gate as the farm had cows, horses and chickens that wandered. Often in the morning I would wake up to see cows outside my bedroom window.

We had an "old school" outhouse a hike from the cottage, but also a very ingenious indoor water system. A switch in the kitchen would turn on a pump that filled a bathtub on the second floor. This allowed us to turn on a tap in the kitchen sink below. Hanging from the ceiling over the pump switch was a lead weight on a piece of fishing line and attached to a float in the bathtub. It showed us when the bathtub above us was close to overflowing.



Shirley & Doug Baker, 1939



Arthur & Maude Baker, 1939



Sisters Joan, Shirley, Betty Baker, 1939



The cottage had a wraparound screened in porch on the west and north sides with a lovely squeaky screen door, a swing bed on metal chains, and wicker furniture with cushions. You could look out to the lake, into the trees or into the farmland behind where you might see work horses and hired men using pitch forks to hay the field.

One summer in the late 50's my brother and I put up a sign at the dock, "Frogs for Sale – 5 cents". We caught and sold enough frogs from the nearby swamp for both of us to spend a whole day at the Ottawa Exhibition at Lansdowne Park.

My parents would use jugs from the cottage to bring well water from an outside tap at the old post office building in Lombardy. In Lombardy, there was a general store owned by a retired couple. The soda pop, in glass bottles, was kept cold in a water-filled metal bin. My favorite pop was Swiss Cream Soda. Next door there was a stable with horses that were trained for sulky racing. I would go and feed the horses carrots or sugar while my parents took care of things at the general store.

When we drove to the cottage from Ottawa, we kids would ask to stop for a treat in Smiths Falls at Gibson's, or at the store in Lombardy. I remember a big, frosted mug at Gibson's and the big Clarke's Dairy logo in the front window of the Lombardy general store. We were allowed one treat. We tried to get them to stop both on the way up and back to Ottawa, but money was tight. Back in the day, only my dad worked full-time, so there wasn't a second income for any extras. Going out for a meal in a restaurant was never in the cards and our only summer holiday was at the cottage.

In the winter when I was a teenager in the mid 60's, my dad would tie ropes to the back bumper of the car and pull us on skis or a toboggan along Mahon Road. From the Mahon farmhouse we had to hike in on skis – the road was not plowed past the farm and was deep with snow. We would eat a packed lunch outside once we got there, because the cottage was always colder inside than out at that time of year. We would go inside to make tea to warm up, boiling snow for the water. One year the tea tasted very strange. My dad looked in the tea pot to find a dead mouse floating with the tea bags!

Mice were always a problem – lots of nests in drawers in the spring and nibbled bedding. Of course, in summer, the occasional bat made it in via the chimney to swoop around until it was captured with a long-handled fishing net. One year we even had a rat snake hiding under the wicker sofa on the porch.

In 1968 when my grandfather died, he left the cottage to his four sons, my father Douglas Arthur and his three brothers Frank, Laurie, and Grant. A hot water tank and indoor plumbing were added - to the delight of all four families. The four brothers would plan a work party every spring and fall to open and close the cottage – take off the shutters, lower the docks, reset the corner foundation supports that kept the cottage level, fix broken windowpanes and screens.

Up until 1968 each of the four sons would take ½ of July or August to spend at the lake with their father, who had been widowed in 1951. In the fall my grandfather would travel to England to stay with his two cousins, and in the winter, he would go to Florida. But from the long weekend in May until Labor Day weekend in September, he stayed at the lake, puttering around, and working on various projects. He

set the stone steps that we still walk on today to get down to the water. He would fish every morning with his neighbor gentleman friends – Mr. Walker, Mr. Seaman, and Dr. Blick.

After their father passed away, the four Baker brothers continued to share the summer months at the lake, always making sure that the floors were swept, the refrigerator cleaned out, and the fireplace set for the next family. When my 2 siblings and I married and had our own families, we would all vacation at the same time at the cottage with our parents, Doug and Shirley. There would be 15 of us sitting down for every meal. That family table sits in the living room of the present house. Each family would be responsible for dinner on a rotating basis, and another family would do the dishes. For breakfasts and lunch, you were on your own. If there was ever fresh baking, a dozen muffins would disappear quickly!

The cottage, just 25 feet square, with its traditional dark green cedar shingles, red roof, brick fireplace and yellow window frames, aged gracefully, even survived the ice storm of 1998, but was always in need of repair. It became evident that major and expensive work would soon be in the cards, including a new septic system and a new roof. By 2000, all four Baker brothers were gone, and each one left his ¼ share to his children. The cottage was now owned by twelve families. My husband and I had always wanted to sell our house in Ottawa and build a year-round home somewhere on Big Rideau Lake. In 2001, all the cousins agreed to let us buy their shares. In the summer of 2002, my husband John and I both retired within a month of each other, moved into the old cottage and watched our new home being built just a few steps away.

We moved in just in time to celebrate the birth of five grandchildren. Township regulations required that the old cottage had to be taken down within the year, and that was a bittersweet day for everyone. So many wonderful memories spanning so many years.



In our new home, we had the foundation poured so that the house faced the same way as the old cottage – the dining area looking to the west out over the lake, the kitchen facing north and the bedrooms facing east and south. We knew exactly where to have windows and doors to take advantage of sun and breeze in the summer, and for protection from the north wind in the winter. The modular home was brought in on two fifty-foot-long flatbed trailers, and a huge crane lifted each half on to the foundation.

We were determined to keep some of the old cottage incorporated into the new house. The handrails going down into the basement are the ones that went up to the bedrooms in the old cottage. The French doors that separated the cottage screened-in porch from the living room now separate the

basement bedroom from the family room. The oil painting of The Province, the ship my grandfather sailed on as first mate in 1905 used to hang in the living room of the cottage and now hangs above the fireplace in our great room. The plaque that hung over the cottage fireplace is in the new house and reads **“Come rest ye brother workers, nor let us labour more.”** The deteriorating wooden letters that read **“Lasata”**, embedded in the concrete hearth of the old fireplace, were copied, and recut, preserving another piece of Baker history.

Since building our new home, I have been privileged to be the full-time caretaker of this glorious plot of land. The summers are lovely, with lots of family and daily lakeshore activities. But, the winters are glorious too with pristine snow and a kilometer long frozen stretch of lake over which I look at the entrance to Adam Lake from my dining room every day.