

Festubert: A Wistful Memory of an Earlier Time

by J. Ross Osborne

During the 1930's all that remained of the first Festubert seasonal post office on a tiny Ontario island in Loon Lake, now known as Skootamatta Lake, was the building's granite fireplace and foundation. The post office had been located in Mike Schwaeger's frame house. The house, with its three verandas and an outhouse, took up all the available space on the island. Mike became the first postmaster of Festubert when the post office opened July 1, 1927⁽¹⁾. The



Fig. 1. Proof date cancellation courtesy of the Canadian Postal Archives.



Fig. 2. Festubert's first post office.

girl that Mike intended to marry made it known that she did not want to live on a tiny island, especially one with no title to the land. Mike could not secure title to his island because of a problem with the outhouse. Even in those days pollution control was important. When the summer season ended in September 1927 Mike sold the frame house and post office. It was towed away on the ice during the winter months. No longer could the cottagers tie up their boats to the post office's veranda when they came for their mail.

In 1927 the Festubert post office served about 28 cottage families and several permanent residents. Although Festubert was located near Bon Echo, in the township of Anglesea in Lennox/Addington county, the mail was exchanged with Cloyne, about three miles away. Mike picked up the mail at Stanley Wheeler's general store and post office in Cloyne. The mail came to Cloyne via the postal courier, Harry Levere, who had the mail contract between the railway station in Kaladar, (17 miles away), and Cloyne.



Back in 1926 when an application for a post office was made by Mike Schwaeger the question of a name was raised. It was the author's late father, A. Ross Osborne, who suggested the name of Festubert. Mr. Osborne, whose family cottage was in the area, remembered the village of Festubert in France. It had been the scene of heavy fighting between the French and British and the German forces during World War I. The village gave its name to the battle fought in the immediate area on May 9, 1915.

The British made a forward move to relieve pressure on the French as well as to prevent the Germans sending reinforcements to Lens. The battle ended with a disastrous loss to the British although the Canadian army fighting alongside the British achieved "great distinction."⁽²⁾



Fig. 4. Festubert's second and last post office with Mrs. Yvonne (Yanch) Bruskey on the veranda.

When the summer season opened in 1928 Mrs. Beatrice L. Yanch of Flinton, Ontario took over the Festubert post office and relocated it in her general store known as the Royal Oak cottage. The post office was now on the mainland nearly 1/2 km (1/4 mile) from Mike's island. Mrs. Yanch served as postmistress for two seasons, the summers of 1928 and 1929. Near the end of

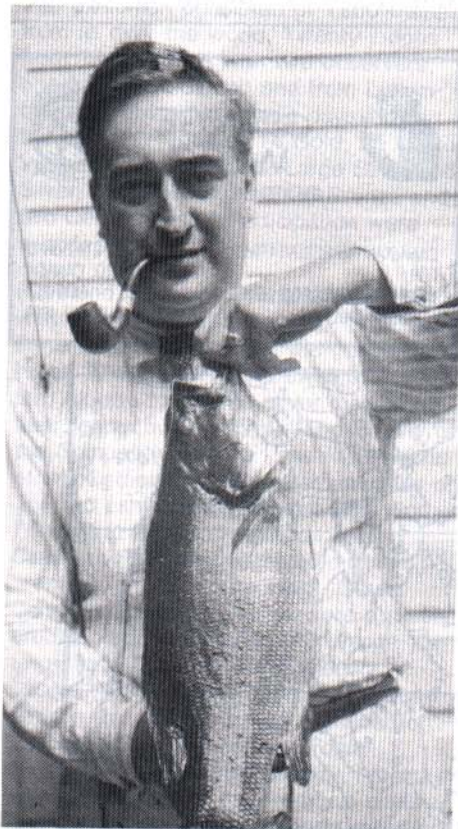


Fig. 3. The late A. Ross Osborne with 7 lb. small mouth bass (1927).



Fig. 5. Pencil sketch of Mike Schwaeger.

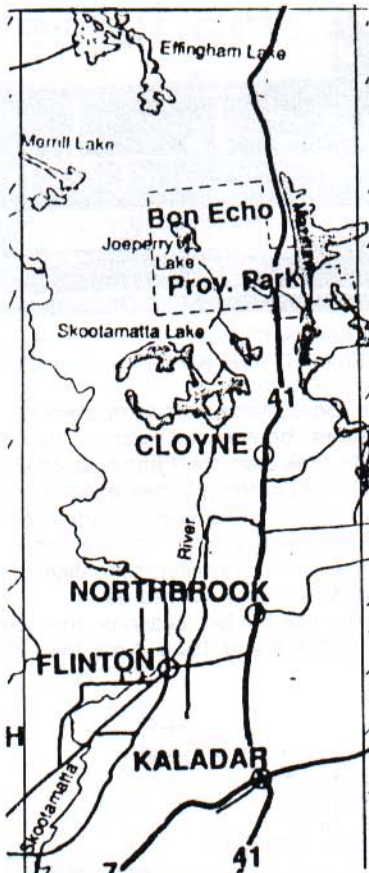


Fig. 6. Map showing location of Skootamatta Lake.

the 1929 season her daughter Yvonne was injured by a pellet from a BB gun on July 26 and eventually lost the sight of one eye. Due to this traumatic incident Mrs. Yanch gave up the post office when it closed for the summer season on August 31, 1929. It was not until October 1, 1931 that the Post Office Department officially declared that the Festubert post office was closed permanently. It would be interesting to learn if any postal historians have a cover from Festubert.

FOOTNOTES:

- (1) Canadian Postal Archives, Ottawa, Ontario.
- (2) Encyclopedia Britannica.

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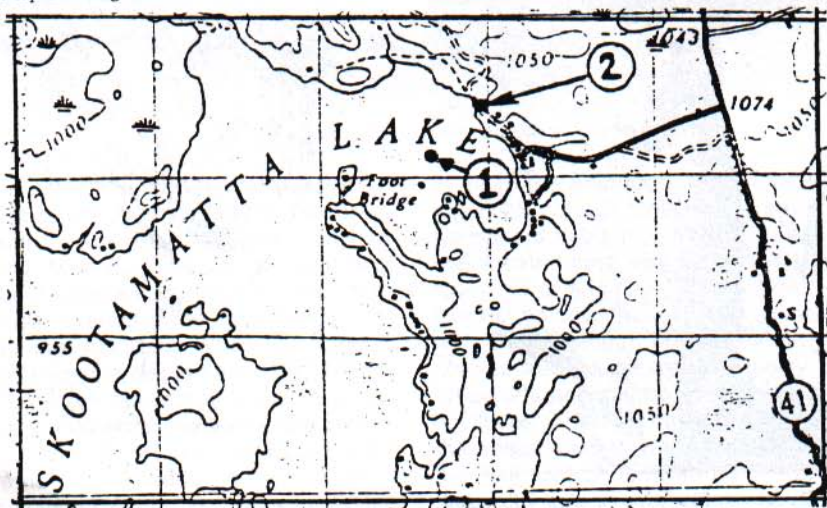


Fig. 7. Map showing location of Festubert.