

“San Jose”, Trout Lake, North Bay

This beautiful lake front property was bequeathed in 1961 to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Sault Ste. Marie in the Will of John Blanchet of North Bay. John, the brother of Matilda St. Pierre, grandmother of Sister Nona Dennis, was Nona’s great uncle. John had married Catherine and together they had a son Clifton who died in 1919 aged 23 in WWI. Catherine died young, and John re-married her private nurse Mabel, aunt of Sister Leona Spencer. They had no children.

“I further direct that when my wife has no further use for my summer house on Trout Lake, it is to be turned over to the Sisters of St. Joseph’s Hospital...”



Mabel and John Blanchet with nephew Jim Dennis and his son John, brother of Sr. Nona Dennis on the dock



View facing west from the frozen lake. 1930’s

John was a great hunter, even travelling to Africa, and trophies of his hunts adorned the Stone House built around 1910. John had built a Delco plant (later the lighthouse) to provide electricity, and erected a windmill to provide water for his cottage – a rare thing on Trout Lake in those days. John had several boats and two covered boat houses, one facing east and one facing west. The main east facing boathouse (see photo) had four bays, the stone foundations of which can still be seen below the water surface off the later dock.

“John wanted to leave his cottage property to the priests of the Diocese but Aunt Mabel convinced him it would be better used by the Sisters of St. Joseph.” (Adapted from a note written by Nona’s sister Rose (Dennis) Mannion, July 1997)

Through the negotiating assistance of Msgr. Frank Devine in 1961, Mabel agreed to allow the Sisters to assume use of her property when they offered to build her a private cottage which was named “St. John’s” to honour her deceased husband, John Blanchet. At that time the buildings on the property included: the original Stone House, the “Cliff Cottage” or Lloyd’s Cottage used by the widow of Mr. Lloyd who had been hired by the Blanchet’s to help with errands and chores (site of the sauna today), the lighthouse, (later St. Christopher’s Lighthouse) a wood shed between the lighthouse and the Stone Cottage, and a large storage garage (later St. Madeleine’s).

To accommodate the large numbers of Sisters in formation in the 1960’s the Sisters built a second story with bedrooms above the Stone House; converted the storage garage (later St. Madeleine’s) into a kitchen-dining room, until the “Martha House” classroom-dining room was built, (St. Madeleine’s later became a bedroom cottage); built a long bedroom building “St. Cecilia’s”; “St. Benedict’s” (Labore) shower house and laundry and St. Bride’s Chapel, between St. Madeleine’s and St. Cecilia’s cottage. A large dorm was also created in the Stone House on the long front veranda with cots separated by curtains.



Stone House Fire Place



Stone house with second story bedrooms

The property was well used by the Sisters, lay groups and needy families, hosted by the Sisters. For many years, Sisters had summer theology courses and Mass on the property. The winterized Stone House was even used in winter for short vacations. As decades passed and the numbers of Sisters diminished, St. Bride’s Chapel was demolished, St. Cecilia’s was re-purposed into two smaller cottages, one renamed “St. Bride’s” and Martha House converted into a four bedroom cottage.

In 2007 the Stone House was declared unsafe and had to be demolished. The prayer service prepared for the occasion acknowledged the deep gratitude the community has for the Stone House “which brought us joy, laughter, respite, beauty, prayer family and community fun. If the walls could speak, they would tell many wonderful and hilarious stories.

For John and Mabel Blanchet whose generosity and openness has made possible the years of joy and celebration which took place here, we are grateful. May they rest in the joy of the Lord.” (From the prayer ritual for the Blanchet Stone House Demolition)

In the 1980’s, the property was dubbed “San Jose” and an artistic road-side sign painted by Sr. Judy Shea. These cottages are still a welcome refuge for Sisters, their families and their friends wishing to rejuvenate themselves in the summer.