

ONE FAMILY'S (LUNDBORG/LARSON) HISTORY ON THE CULLENS

by Ann Beaver

Three of Samuel Lundborg's siblings were looking to buy land in the Nisswa area back in 1908 and move north from the Belle Plaine area of Minnesota. They could have bought a parcel that extended west and south from present day Highways 371 and 77 to the shore of Gull Lake. However, that area wasn't wild enough for them. Instead, they bought the property between Upper and Middle Cullen Lakes from the channel west half a mile to what was then a cranberry swamp. The two brothers and one sister cleared the land and established a farm and tree nursery.

However, they did not own the land between them and the public road, and they worried about one day being cut off. Their brother, Samuel, came to their rescue by buying the land east of the channel from the railroad in order to guarantee them road access. At that time had no intention of settling there (he lived in Pennsylvania), although there was a small cabin on the land, built by a trapper and his Native American wife in the 1850s or 60s. After the purchase, Samuel returned to Pennsylvania where he and his brother-in-law had a jewelry store.

His situation changed, though, and in 1923, Samuel brought his wife and young daughter, Margaret, to Minnesota. They settled in Brainerd, where Samuel established a jewelry store. The family lived behind the store, and they built a small cottage on their Middle Cullen property, where they spent time in the summer.

The Middle Cullen property was, at that time, nothing but sand with a few small trees around the cottage. This "sand bar" extended from the wetlands on the north along the entire east shore of Middle Cullen. Little by little, Samuel, his family, and his brothers planted the upland area with white pines and other trees that were "spares" from the Lundborg Nursery to the west. They planted the lowland areas with plum trees and enjoyed their bounty for years. When the plum trees began to die, they planted spruce and white pines in their place.

The Upper Cullen property was mostly meadow, with wetland areas along the lake. The Lundborg brothers cut the grasses as bedding for the cows and horses and then burned off the meadow each spring. When they stopped this practice, the meadow quickly filled in with native plants, shrubs, and trees.

In the 1930s, a friend of Samuel's from Pennsylvania wrote him saying he had lost his job and couldn't find another. Samuel sent him a train ticket to come to Minnesota. The friend needed a place to live, so Samuel let him build a small log cabin on his property. The tiny cabin still stands, in good shape, on the property today.

Margaret Lundborg worked in the jewelry store, alongside her parents, from the very start back in 1923, even though she was just a youngster. In 1942, when Samuel died, Margaret took over the business. She married Harry Larson in 1946. After living in Brainerd for 14 years, they built a house on the Middle Cullen property in 1960 and moved to the lake. Harry died in 1966, leaving Margaret to once again run Lundborg

Jewelry Store on her own. She expanded the jewelry store to include china, and she continued to run it until 1990, when she sold it and retired.

Among Margaret's many photographs is the one which shows a former well known landmark for hunters and anglers -- a 36 "room" martin house -- located where the public access is today. When people were disoriented or lost on the lakes, once they spotted the martin house they knew exactly where they were.