

Pennycook Family Cottage History in South Beach, Gimli

Written by Kathleen Coe, Nov 2020

Eileen Murphy was 16 years old when she went to visit her older sister Grace and husband George **Stephen** in Gimli. They invited her to their cottage on Hansson Avenue near South Colonization Road. The area was better known then as South Beach. To her surprise, Eileen's boyfriend Rod Pennycook took the train to Winnipeg Beach and then walked 10 miles to Gimli to see her! Is it any wonder they were married 5 years later (1951) and the saga started.



Eileen and Rod's Gimli story started by first renting the veranda of a cottage from Mr & Mrs John Stephen at *Dorrery Lodge* on Benedict Avenue (SE corner of Anna).

They didn't have a fridge, only an ice box. But Eileen's dad, Jim Murphy, was an engineer for the CPR and quite often operated the train that ran through Gimli to Riverton. He would throw off a huge slab of ice and she would fetch it in a wagon to take home. It lasted for weeks in the ice box. (And sometimes he would sneak the grandkids into the train cab too.)



The Nook in the background

As the Pennycook family grew they rented the following cottages between 1952 & 1960:

1st: *The Nook* was owned by Art Stephen and located on the Stephen compound. Eileen is sure it was the smallest cottage in the world. Bud Harman used to say, you could spit from the front door through to the back of the cottage.

2nd: For two summers they rented Jim Stephen's place also on the Stephen property, a cottage named *Rothiemay*.

3rd: Stachow's *Sundown* on the NW corner of Third Ave and Benedict.

4th: Older sister Frances & Ernie Thompson's cottage on Benedict (27 Benedict) for a couple of years.

5th: The Vockerath cottage (31 Benedict) was the longest they stayed until they built their own.



The Nook

In 1960 Rod and Eileen built their cottage on the southeast corner of Ethel and Anna. They were fortunate to have Rod's father arrange a package deal through his employer – The Empire Sash & Door, with a top builder and excellent materials. When the cottage was finished it was a masterpiece.



Back in the day families traditionally named their cottages, with an appropriate plaque proudly displayed on the front. Sometimes these names were family references or familiar places in the 'old country'. The Pennycook's named theirs *The 7 Pennys*. But when Chris was born they changed it to *The 8 Pennys*. Mrs. Stephen used to say she was waiting for the "thin dime".



Rod came to the cottage every weekend and sometimes on Wednesdays. Eileen never had a car for 12 years. Thank goodness for friends and the Gimli Hospital, which was used frequently. Dr. George Johnson became their “summer family doctor”.



For quite a while The Eight Pennys was painted coral. It would be many years before they had electricity, running water and a bathroom. They also didn't have a telephone, television or computer.

Washing diapers and clothes was a problem. They saved all the rain water for laundry and a separate tub for the diapers, all done by hand and hung on the clothesline.

The drinking water was hauled up by pailful from the artesian well pump at the end of the road near the beach. (It's still there to this day). Eileen's nephew, Allan Stephen worked for the city waterworks and tested it regularly thus assuming that it was excellent drinking water.



Nobody liked using an outhouse, especially Margaret. One day they discovered a dead skunk down the hole. Doug Hicks happened to drop in, so Eileen asked him how to get rid of it. "Oh! Eileen, don't worry, it will get bigger and bigger and bigger and then blow up. I only hope you are not in there when it happens." She immediately told Rod, "We have to build a new outhouse." With that Doug turned around to go home laughing all the

way. Like most cottagers they eventually had a holding tank installed, emptied by the “Honey Man”.

Eileen and Rod’s saga is set in the larger context of the Murphy and Stephen clan, many of whom had property in South Beach as well. And particularly magnified because her older siblings, Stanley and Grace, both married Stephens!

Murphy Family Children:

Stanley Murphy m. Jessie Stephen

Grace m. George Stephen (Allan, Douglas)

Isabel m. Reginald Harman (Ron, Rick)

Frances m. Ernest Thompson (Bryan, Jim, Joan)

Twin Jean m. Cecil French (Shirley, Patti, Marilyn, Randy)

Twin Jim Murphy m. Sharon Tighe (Sherilyn, Stanley, Phyllis, Terry, Lorae)

Eileen m. Roderick Pennycook (Stirling, David, Kathleen, Margaret, Moira, Christopher)



Murphy Family

*Seated L to R: Stan Murphy, Doris Murphy, James Murphy, Grace Stephen,
Back Row L to R: Jean French, Isabel Harman, Jimmy Murphy, Frances
Thompson, Eileen Pennycook*

Eileen's oldest brother, Stan Murphy and his wife Jessie Stephen were married in Vancouver in 1942. Stan's war service was from 1939 – 1945. He started as seaman in the Reserve in 1939 and finished as Lt. C.M.D.R. He was employed by Imperial Optical and was recognized for his managerial ability and was delegated to open branches in Barbados. After 2 years he opened branches in Jamaica as well and served there for 27 years then moved to Toronto and retired to Winnipeg. Shortly after the war he bought two veterans units at an auction at the University of Manitoba.

He had them sent to Gimli and placed them on Benedict St across from *Dorrery Lodge*; one for them and one for Grandma Murphy. The two little cottages were named *Jesta* (a combination of Jessie and Stan) and *Monymusk* (pertaining to a place in Scotland or maybe Jamaica). Eileen's older sister Jean & her husband Cecil French used one of these little cottages when the Murphy's lived in Jamaica. Jean and Cecil also owned *Galway Bay* cottage (28 Benedict).



Doris Murphy and her grandchildren in 1962

*L to R Back Row: Bryan Thompson, Ron Harman, Rick Harman, Shirley French holding Randy French, Allan Stephen holding Moira Pennycook
Middle Row: David Pennycook, Douglas Stephen, Patty French, Jim Thompson, Stirling Pennycook, Joan Thompson, Sherilyn Murphy
Front Row: Kathleen Pennycook, Marilyn French, Stanley Murphy, Doris Murphy holding Christopher Pennycook, Margaret Pennycook, Phyllis Murphy*



Doris Murphy at Jesta



The Three Rods: Rod Jr, Rod Sr, & Rod Stirling, 1979

Like most families at the time, the Pennycooks went to the cottage from July 1st to September 1st. The kids really enjoyed the summer. As long as the weather was good, they went to the beach everyday.



Kathleen in 1959

The women would sit in lawn chairs sipping tea and watching their little darlings. As a regular ritual Eileen would go up to the cottage, as she was the closest, to make the pot of tea and fetch some goodies. Sisters Jean, Grace, and Marg Hicks would look after the kids in her absence. Everyone enjoyed playing with their cousins and friends.



In the evenings and days of bad weather they played games, did puzzles, or read books. They never had a TV at the cottage and they never seemed to mind. They played a lot of card games. (Regarding the weekend adult card games, they told Doug Hicks that Rod would have retired earlier if Doug hadn't won all their money.)



Eileen and Rod, ca. 1970

Everyone is used to the fish flies but Eileen remembers the “Year of the Frogs”. In 1972 there were thousands of them. The roads were turned to green and looked like a wavy river as far as the eye could see. Their appearance was a mystery and they disappeared after the summer ended. Also a mystery.



Spring raking, Kathleen and Eileen

Everyone went to the Gimli movie theatre on Saturday nights. 15 cents for kids and 25 cents for Adults. They still remember the film called The Hallelujah Trail, a 1965 American Western mockumentary spoof, the longest and stupidest movie any of them had ever seen. Kathleen lucked out. She had misbehaved so had to stay home and was fortunate not to have to suffer through it.

The children all learned to swim through the Red Cross program in Gimli. Red Cross distributed information at the beginning of the summer on the program by flyers. Instruction was given to 5 to 12 year olds at the Gimli

Pier for Beginners, Juniors, Intermediates and Life Saving Bronze. The youngest kids were taught on the beach. The older ones were on the piers, a scary experience for them, when they had to jump or dive off. Stirling still has all his badges to this day.



In 1982 the Pennycook's bought the cottage next door on the east side from the Van family. A platform deck between the two cottages was built shortly thereafter and one of the highlights of the year began – the entertainment, singing and dancing with homemade dresses and costumes by the kids under Eileen's son-in-law Ken Coe's direction. It grew over time so that all the neighbours in South Beach attended. When

Eileen expressed her concern as to the quality of the performances Ken told her not to worry – he was “Keeper of the HOOK”.



Pennycook 'stage'

Some of the highlight star performances were:
Craig Stephen – Michael Jackson, Moon Walk
Brynn Harman – These Boots Were Made For Walking
Chris Trubyk – Sports Announcer
Shawn Coe – Burn in Hell & Splish Splash I was Taking a Bath
8 adults Square Dancing – led by George & Grace Stephen



Once the grandkids arrived the summer began with a ritual flag raising. Eileen would have a cake made up at the Central Bakery (Centre Street, Gimli) decorated with the Canadian Flag. All the neighbours including the Sobkowichs, Woods, Wards and Hicks, would come over and sing *O Canada* whilst Kathleen and Ken's son Scott Coe hoisted the flag up the pole in front of the cottage. Once the flag flew everyone knew beach time had started in earnest.





Christopher's son, Randy singing O Canada



Neighbours gather for the flag raising



Canada Day 1993



Pennycook grandchildren on trampoline, 1997



Eileen & Rod's grandchildren, 2016

Eileen often wondered why they left their new home in Winnipeg with all the necessary appliances but as it turned out Gimli was where they were most fortunate to be in the summer. Quite often Grandad and Grandma Pennycook, along with Rod's sister Moira & Sam Malegus visited them on weekends. Golfing buddies from St. Charles and curling friends from the city were regular visitors. They always attended the parades and played golf.



L to R: Kathleen Coe, Margaret Daniel, David Pennycook, Eileen Pennycook, Rod Pennycook, Moira Malegus, Chris Pennycook, Moira Farrer, Stirling Pennycook in 2017



2017 Family Reunion



Annual Murphy Family baseball game

Eileen celebrated her 90th birthday on July 18, 2020. She smiles as she says “we were so thankful for the many blessings South Beach offered.”



*Eileen & Rod's Children, Palm Springs, Christmas 2019
L to R: Chris, Moira, Margaret, Kathleen, David and Stirling*

Daughter Kathleen and husband Ken Coe took over The Eight Pennys (24 Ethel) in 2003. At her retirement in 2013 Ken turned it into their permanent home.



Coe Residence, 2020