

JOHN FULTON TURNBULL'S LEGACY: A HISTORY OF THE ORILLIA GUN CLUB

If it were not for John F. Turnbull, the Orillia Gun Club as we know it would not exist.

John was born in Nova Scotia in 1894. As a boy he enjoyed the outdoors and learned to hunt and shoot. He served in WWI, was awarded the Military Medal for Bravery and was wounded at Vimy Ridge.

Upon returning to Canada, he entered the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Toronto and graduated in 1922. In 1930 he bought the 385 acre Cunningham farm on Lake Couchiching and named it "Bramshott Farm". Bramshott in England was the location where large numbers of Canadian troops were stationed. John's future wife Jean Craik, worked as a volunteer in a hospital at Bramshott. This is where they met and were married. John chose the name "Bramshott" for his farm because of this and also because he knew that other Canadian veterans would recognize the name.

He started his shooting hobby at once, building a 20 yard range near the house. It attracted a small group of shooters from Orillia and area and by the mid 1930's he had constructed skeet towers, and 20 and 100 yard ranges in his pasture at the present location of the Gun Club. For indoor shooting in the winter, the group used a range in the basement of the Armoury in Orillia.

Back in the 1920's, it was a New Year's event for folks to go down to the lake shore at the foot of Mississauga St. in Orillia and watch as several men shot a few rounds of trap. Spectators would watch the proceedings from the town dock. Apparently, it was this group of men who, along with John Turnbull, formed the nucleus of the Orillia Gun Club. These gentlemen are among the names noted later.

In 1950, John began the Bramshott subdivision, selling lots and gradually getting out of the farming business.

When the last of John's animals were sold about 1955, he constructed a 20 yard indoor range on the main floor of his barn as the Armoury range in Orillia was closed. This is the large grey barn you can see on the lake side of Turnbull Drive.

Letters Patent (under the Companies Act) to establish the Orillia Gun Club as a legal entity, were signed on July 12, 1949 and contained the following clause: "Provided, however, that the Corporation may establish or operate a club house within the limits of the said Town of Orillia or within an area not more than fifteen miles distant from the corporate limits of the said Town of Orillia and not elsewhere;".

The first directors of the new club were: John Fulton Turnbull; Gordon Shell; Walter Harry Louie; Milton Thompson; and Hugh McArthur. The first president was Fred Ritter. John Turnbull served as president for a number of years and also held other

positions on the executive. The original membership fee was \$2.00 per year! The club continued to operate on the property still owned by John Turnbull. An "Orillia Gun Club" sign was erected at the present entrance to the club in 1953.

On June 6, 1959, an article extolling the virtues of the Orillia Gun Club appeared in the Globe and Mail. It described the club as having "just about everything" as it "offers trap, skeet, rifle and revolver facilities". It speaks about the running deer range and; "Another game that provide a lot of fun and good practice for deer hunters is shooting at a rolling bullseye. Fasten a cardboard disc in an old tire, paint rings and a bullseye on it and send it rolling down a hill". It also mentions that the club was one of five spots in Canada to host tryouts for the .22 match rifle event at the Pan American Games in Chicago the following year. For nearly 40 years each fall, the shooters held a Hunters Match with moving and still targets. The Twin Cities Rifle Club was the main opposition.

The Ellwood Epps store has long had a close association with the gun club. Ellwood Epps originally had a similar store in Clinton, Ontario. He and Cliff Schisler, who had a sporting goods store in Kittimat, B.C., met through business connections. Ellwood and Cliff became partners and opened the Epps store by the gun club in the fall of 1962. The reason they chose this site was the presence of the gun club right next door.

Cliff Schisler sold his interest in the Ellwood Epps Co. in 1970. He and Olive then built their current location and opened their business under the name "ad hominem" (Latin for; "The Man, His Interests and Passions") in 1973.

The present owners of Ellwood Epps, Winne, George and Wes Winkel, from the Listowel area, opened for business in May, 1996.

John Turnbull died September 29, 1963, and his estate took over ownership of the land. In January, 1964, the estate offered to sell land to the club for \$4,500 to be reduced to \$3,500 if the club surrendered all of its interest in any lease on the remaining land. In order to raise the money, the club sold debentures in \$100.00 denominations to club members. Many members rose to the occasion. The club now owned 44 3/4 acres.

In early 1967, the club had to vacate their range in the Turnbull barn as the new owners wanted to use the building. Again, by selling debentures to club members, the club was able to raise enough money to build the existing clubhouse and indoor range later that year. The building was designed primarily by Lou Brennan. Lou, a bricklayer, was the head honcho in laying the blocks for the indoor range. The metal siding that is on the clubhouse and garage today was installed in 1990.

The present skeet houses were also built by Lou Brennan in 1968 taking the place of the wooden towers erected by John Turnbull and others.

Skeet and trap ranges have existed at the club for many years. However, sporting clays is a relative new activity. A proposal to create a sporting clays course was adopted in April 1990 and work began on setting up a course.

We, as members of the Orillia Gun Club, owe a debt of gratitude to John F. Turnbull for inviting other shooters to use his property and to join him in a sport that he loved. To quote George Cook; "It would not have been the present set-up which exists today except for the generosity and help of John Turnbull, a gentleman if there ever was one". He and others such as Henry Creswell, Russ MacDonald, Walter Louie, Wilf Widmeyer, Frank Woodworth, John Ross Sr. and Jr., Walter Stockford, Fred Ritter and his sons Fred Jr. and Rod, Bert Hawke, George Cook, Lou Brennan, Ozzie Batzold and Hap Haywood worked tirelessly to build facilities and operate a successful shooting club. No doubt there were others as well. Over the years, many other members stepped forward to carry on the work so we could all enjoy the facilities that we have today. Thanks to all of you! Now it is up to us to pass on an even better club to shooters of the future.

(Thanks to the Turnbull family for background material and pictures and to Cliff and Olive Schisler, George Cook, Lou Brennan, Winnie Winkel, Rob Wise, and Bob Barkey for information for this article.)