

Honouring our best loved trees

— by Cathy Kuntz

For 107 years, a majestic white pine stood poised on the crest of a hill, at the edge of Fairlight Glen Crescent in Bracebridge. It stood 110 feet tall, higher than the tallest building in the town. At chest height it was 13 feet around. It was a remarkable tree.

A long-time resident, it was an icon in the neighbourhood. Everyone who visited the area noticed it. And they noticed when its needles slowly turned orange.

Last summer, when the Town of Bracebridge cut it down for safety reasons, biologist and Fairlight Glen neighbor Bill Dickinson approached them and asked for a few cookies.

“You don’t see many trees of that diameter around,” says Dickinson, a volunteer and former director with the Muskoka Conservancy.

A tree cookie is a slice of time. It’s a cross section of a trunk that illustrates a tree’s life story.

The wide rings in the center

Bill Dickinson has preserved slices from the trunk of a massive white pine that grew near his home. He’s asking others in Muskoka to take note of significant trees in their neighbourhoods.

of the Fairlight Glen pine indicate it had optimal growing conditions.

“The pine grew like crazy its first fifteen years,” Dickinson says. “It was growing on a farm on an alluvial flood plain. It had space and it had manure.”

“Looking at those rings made me wonder about all the things that happened throughout its life,” Dickinson says. “I wanted to mark the chronology of events on the face of the cookie and display it outside the Conservancy office.”

In 1920 the Group of Seven was formed. In 1970 the District of Muskoka was founded. In 1987 the Muskoka Heritage Foundation was established. The tree stood through all of it.

“This has got us thinking there might be other trees in Muskoka that are iconic for people,” Dickinson says.

They might be tall, have a large diameter, an interesting shape or silhouette. They might have been planted in memory of someone and have some other personal significance to Muskoka residents and cottagers. Or maybe, they’re simply beautiful.

The Conservancy hopes to recognize remarkable trees on their website and in their newsletter in the future.

“Trees mean something to people,” Dickinson says. “We want to celebrate our trees.” **LS**

A SLICE OF TIME

