

hotel for Bala. He knew that it would not be long before more tourists came.

Last fall, my wife Linda and I began a search for any documents which would show how, and when, Sutton and his son, Fred, built the Swastika Hotel, which is now the Bala Bay Inn. As a member of the township's heritage committee, Linda was hoping to recommend that Muskoka's first brick summer hotel be given heritage status.

Bob Sutton generously offered us all of his family archives, and we spent hours pouring over receipts and other documents, assisted by Ken Bol, who leased and managed the Bala Bay Inn with his wife, Tiffany, for several years before the recent sale.

Some have claimed that the hotel opened in 1912 — or even as late as 1914. What we found reveals that the whole project started long before that. We located a receipt from the Milton Pressed Brick Co., dated February 1909, listing five separate shipments of bricks to

his hotel in 1910? The word and its symbol had always represented good luck or good fortune. The symbol was used with that meaning by American Indians for centuries and by the Greeks and Romans before them.

So that's why Sutton chose the good luck swastika symbol. I think he wanted to reassure his guests that he had spent extra money on a brick hotel (it cost him a whopping \$20,000 to build) so they could sleep comfortably in their beds without fear of fires.

The rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany during the 1930s gave a sinister new meaning to the swastika symbol, but nobody knew that on Friday night, June 17, 1910, when Sutton invited everyone in Bala to come to a grand opening of the new hotel that he and Fred had just built. Here is how Sutton described the event the following day in his *Orillia Packet* column.

"Even the folks who are supposed to take no stock in such frivolities were seen wandering home after daylight. Everything

summer cottage. Fred always said that was the best thing they ever did because a Toronto family called Holden rented it, and Fred met the daughter, Lillian. Just before Thanksgiving in 1916, to no one's surprise, the couple announced that they planned to marry.

The couple planned to wed later, after Fred had time to build a house on one of the pieces of property that the Suttons owned around Bala. But things didn't work out that way.

Days after the engagement was announced, Rose Sutton wasn't feeling well. However, she decided to do laundry (a far more onerous chore than it is today with electric machines and dryers). She completed the wash and was halfway through getting bulky clothing through the hand wringer when she felt ill. She staggered back to the living quarters of the hotel and fell into the arms of her husband. She died a short time later as a result of a stroke.

From the day of Rose's death, E.B. Sutton was a changed man. Readers of his newspaper columns did not know that his own health had been failing for years. In 1907, doctors in England told him during a vacation there that he was suffering from progressive hardening of the arteries — a condition that eventually led to his death. Within years, he was using a cane to get around.

Sutton lost interest in life after Rose died. A worried Fred and Lillian moved their wedding date ahead to January 1917, so they could both look after E.B. Upon their return from a Bermuda honeymoon, they moved right into the hotel.

Lillian never forgot their first day back in Bala. "Fred dropped some water on our bedroom floor and it froze almost immediately," she told me. "What a change from Bermuda!"

One day in early August 1917, Lillian entered her father-in-law's bedroom and found him lying there with tears streaming down his cheeks. "I'm sorry," Sutton told her, "I've just been wondering whether I'll ever see my Rose again."

Lillian said she did her best to reassure him. "I told him I was sure he would see Rose again. That didn't seem to satisfy him. He said people just went into a deep sleep at death. So, trying to cheer him up, I said that if I died before he did, I'd come back and give three loud knocks as a signal



CAMP SUTTON: This was the two-storey lodge that E.B. Sutton built on Lake Muskoka at Bannockburn in 1883. Camp Sutton was a great success until it burned down in 1897 (not too long after this photo was taken). Sutton can be seen in the left foreground in a tiny steam launch.

that I was on the other side. He seemed to perk up at that thought and said that he'd make the same promise to me."

Weeks later, E.B. Sutton died quietly in his hotel living quarters (ironically, the first electric lights in Bala, which he had waited so long to see, went on hours later). That night, while his body lay in state in a room next to the hotel's ballroom (now the Ghost Lounge in the renovated Bala Bay Inn), Lillian Sutton was sitting in a nearby room with two lady friends from Bala.

Lillian told me the story of what happened next during a 1983 conversation.

"The time was 20 minutes past 2 a.m., I know because I had just glanced at the clock, when the three of us were startled by a bang on the front door. There was a pause, another bang, a pause, and a third and final bang. Then everything was silent except for people moving around trying to find out what had happened. There was not the slightest trace of wind outside, and Fred couldn't find any sign of young people playing a prank. To this day, I still wonder

whether E.B. returned in some way to give me that signal."

The story of 'The Three Knocks' has been shared many times on CBC television and radio and appeared in a book called *Haunted Ontario*, written by Parry Sound writer Terry Boyle. (Boyle will be conducting ghost tours outside the Bala Bay Inn this summer for the second or third year in a row.)

For more than two decades — right up until the early 1940s — Fred and Lillian ran the hotel as a successful family-style hotel. That's when they finally sold it.

They never served liquor in the hotel, but no one seemed to mind. Lillian was the life of the party and organized talent nights and often sang. For years, guests could enjoy horseback riding on trails through 23 acres of property that the Suttons owned north and south of the hotel. It was a great place to be.

The name of the hotel changed to Sutton Manor in the 1930s because of what was happening in Germany, but apart from that, there were few major changes. The Suttons always ran a family hotel.

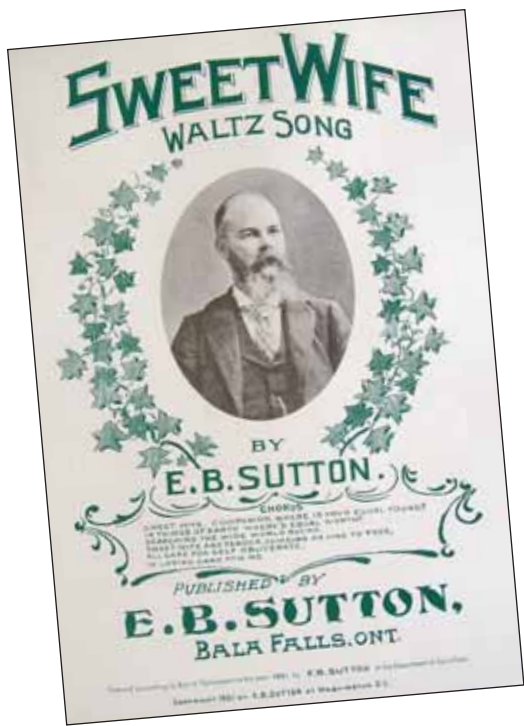
Under new owners, things did change. A beer parlour, introduced during the 1940s, seemed to dominate the hotel during some years, alienating some former patrons who preferred the family atmosphere of the Sutton's years.

The hotel went through several name changes — The Bala Bay Inn, The Bala Bay Lodge, The Cranberry House, and finally, The Bala Bay Inn once more.

The hotel went into receivership more than once, but it also had periods of renaissance which raised the hopes of the whole town.

In the early 1970s, Bill and Jane Eaton did extensive renovations and brought the hotel's history alive again. In 1981, there were great hopes for a private development group that received \$500,000 in provincial grants. When that project fizzled out (one partner went to jail), the hotel was closed for a few years.

In the last decade, Ken and Tiffany Bol put a new face back on the hotel, stressing its heritage. During the years the Bols leased the hotel, local families came back for special occasions.



A LOVE STORY IN SONG: E.B. Sutton, who wrote seven musical compositions, dedicated his first song, *Sweet Wife*, to his wife, Rose. It was published in 1901.

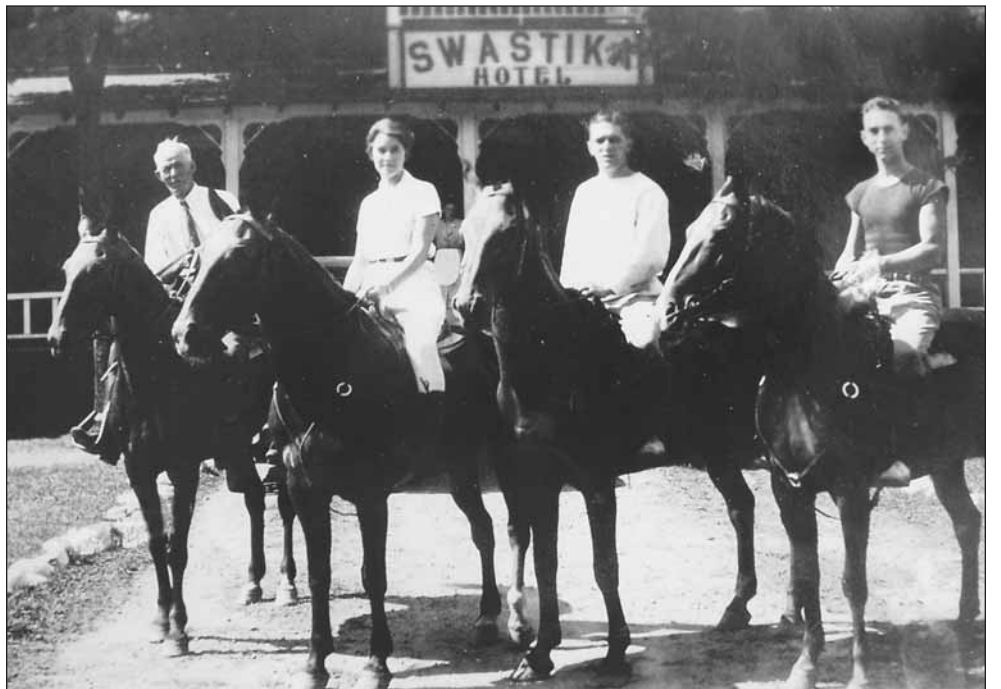
E.B. Sutton in January.

The logistics of getting tons of bricks from one part of town to another were mind-boggling back then. In the middle of a Muskoka winter, Sutton would have had to line up every wagon team of horses in town in order to carry the bricks from the new CPR train station (or a nearby siding) to the future site of the Swastika Hotel. (Remember that today's straightened-out highway didn't exist then: the drivers drove through the CPR overpass — then almost new — along what was Bala's main street. Dunn's Pavilion wasn't on that street for another 20 years.)

Why did Sutton choose the name 'Swastika' for

went merry as a marriage bell. The music was provided by five players and consisted of piano, mandolin, guitar, violin and snare drums, an orchestra as unique as their music was fine. The Minett steam launch brought a contingent from Carling, while a gasoline brought the musicians from Bracebridge. There was just enough wax, and just enough spring from the floor, and the number of feet might be 30 score. Oh, what a time we had!" At daylight, Sutton reported, the guests produced a rousing three cheers and a tiger.

In 1914, Sutton decided to rent his former store, which Fred had now converted into a



HORSEBACK RIDING IN BALA: Guests at the old Swastika Hotel could once ride through 23 acres of property owned by the Sutton family north and south of the present Bala Bay Inn. At the left are Thomas Burgess Jr., son of Bala's founder, and his daughter, Alison, whose son is Bala realtor Mark Gidley. The other two in the photo are unknown.