

THE PIKE LAKE DAM

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While the current of Grants Creek and the Tay River may not seem to amount to much by the megawatt hydro standards of the twenty-first century, they provided ample current to power nineteenth century mills. The first, and the best-known, mill was Allan's Mill located off the Scotch line on Allans Mill Road.

William Allan was the son of Frances Allan one of the Scottish émigrés who settled on the Scotch Line in 1816. Born in Ontario in 1833, William purchased a large parcel of land south of the Scotch Line, through which flowed Grants Creek. Here, he built a sawmill and a stone grist mill, both of which used the power from the creek to operate the water wheel. He then added a grocery and dry goods store, as well as a blacksmith shop run by George Murphy. Pat Fagan, wagon maker, Ed Murphy, a shoemaker, and William Steele, a carpenter, also established themselves at this site. Allan's Mills gained official status when he opened a post office in 1872.

William was not the only farmer to take advantage of the power offered by Grants Creek, or the Tay River into which the creek flows. By 1878, George Oliver had set up a grist mill a few hundred yards downstream from Allan's two mills and, just north of the Scotch line on the Tay River, there were several other mills.

William constructed the original Pike Lake dam to provide a storage reservoir for his mill operations. At that time, the landowners on Pike Lake were paid an annual amount for flooding rights. Around 1892, William sold the grist mill to the Burgess Milling Company. Mr. W. Cameron purchased the mill in 1945 and only operated it for a year or so. Mr. Ritchie then became the owner; however, he had no interest in the Pike Lake dam and, because there had been no payments for flooding for some fifteen years, he lost his water rights. In 1967, the land belonged to Mr. H. Byrnes.

The original dam was an old rock filled crib structure faced with two-inch thick planking on the upstream side. It was about sixty feet long and about five feet high on the upstream side, with a sluiceway about six feet wide at the centre. Mr. Byrnes had been looking after the dam for several years to maintain lake water levels and supply a steady flow to the farmers downstream. He was afraid to repair the dam for fear of downstream damage claims. He had no objections to the province rebuilding the dam.

On August 10, 1966, a petition was drawn up by the residents of Pike, Little Crosby, and Crosby Lakes requesting the province create a "permanent method of restoring water levels." After a survey of residents and observations of the height of boathouse floors, wharves, retaining walls, and tree growth around the lakes the controlled water level was determined. Because of constant requirements to avoid flooding, to ensure downstream flow requirements, and maintain navigation through the three lakes, the level of the lake is adjusted as the season progresses.

The constant level of the lakes was felt to be a major benefit to local landowners who would be able to subdivide their lakefront property and sell the same to prospective cottagers. All landowners had to agree on the level of the new dam. A new structure was rebuilt on the original site in 1970 and is currently operated by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Levels are managed to maintain a suitable water level for recreational activities on the three lakes upstream as well as to fulfill downstream requirements.

The current dam contains three stop-log sluiceways with three wooden logs in each sluiceway. The two bottom logs in each sluiceway are twelve inches high, the top logs on the two outside sluiceways are six inches high, and the centre is four inches. The bottom log has an opening designed to provide a continuous downstream flow into Grants Creek of five cubic feet per second. This base flow is increased to ten cubic feet per second during the drier summer months from July 1 to September 15. Most log manipulations occur during spring run-off to prevent flooding and the fall draw down, with the uppermost target level of 3.2 feet (showing on the marker at the dam), and the winter level of two feet. The lower winter assists in water management for the upcoming spring runoff.

Although target water levels have been established, it should be recognized that Mother Nature plays a big role; very heavy snowfall, extreme rain events, or lack of rain are just a few of the variables that throw a curve into the planned levels.

Postscript: The depletion of wheat and timber supplies towards the end of the nineteenth century took its toll. The sawmills closed as a result of large scale clearing while the grist mills gradually ceased to operate as farmers converted from wheat to dairy.