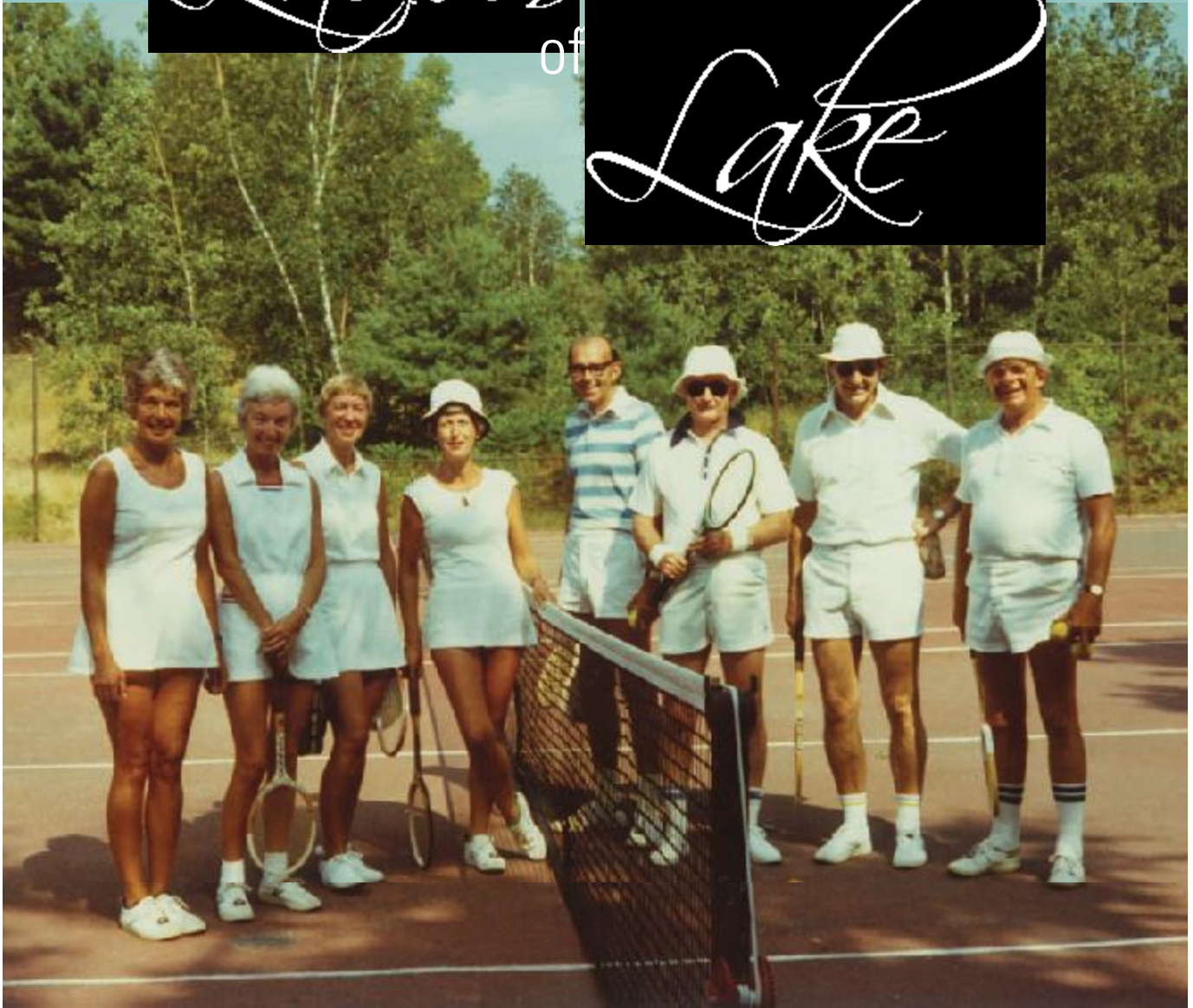


Ladies

of

Lake



A tennis tradition

Tennis Regulars in 1978 (left to Right) Marjorie Wadman, Dodie Forestell, Beth Ratcliffe, Donnie Farley, Gene Garley, Paul Forestell, John Ratcliffe and Ed Wadham

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Photos supplied by: Marjorie Wadham

As faithfully as a congregation flocks to church on Sundays, the tennis ladies head to the courts at Glenmount every Monday and Thursday morning during the summer. They descend in cars, boats, on foot and even the occasional bike. Kids activities, work and vacation schedules are juggled around it. Breakfast dishes are left in the sink and grocery shopping is put on hold. House guests are invited to come or get left at the cottage to fend for themselves. Ladies' Day is a tennis club tradition that can only be truly understood when one knows the story of how the Lake of Bays Tennis Club got started.

Early in the 1970s five women cottagers who loved to play tennis went looking for a place to play. They had played at Bigwin until it was converted into condominiums in about 1971 and cottagers were no longer welcome. They tried Britannia for a couple of years until it too was no longer open to the public. Tennis courts were in short supply around the lake, but someone told them about the overgrown and scarcely used courts at Glenmount. The five friends (Barb Abel, Sylvia Garrat, Ceese McRuer, Beth Ratcliffe and Marge Wadham) learned the courts were owned by two neighbouring cottagers, Bob Fasken and Richard Hogarth.

Probably built around 1933, the two courts belonged to the old Glenmount Hotel, which had long since been torn down. The posts on the perimeter were still standing – very crookedly – but the wire netting had disintegrated. The hard surface was mostly intact but seriously worn down in some areas; branches, bushes and shrubs were everywhere. The white lines – only an inch wide – were barely visible, but the wooden shelter beside the courts was still in fairly good repair. Joe Connell, who summered in an adjacent cottage, had some old rope nets that he put up each year and people would occasionally go and hit balls through and around the vegetation. It was cottage country tennis in the extreme.



But the ladies saw the potential of what those courts had been and could be again. Bob and Richard gave permission for the courts to be fixed up and the ladies set to work. Everyone weeded and trimmed and Beth and Syl painted the lines on their hands and knees with one inch paint brushes. There was to be no dispute as to whether a shot was in or out! Beth recalls that the year was 1972 or 1973.

At first not many people knew about the availability of these modestly refurbished courts and play went by the honour system — people were very good about vacating the court when their set was finished. But word spread and soon it was difficult to get playing time. More regulation was necessary. And chasing balls into the undergrowth had become tiresome. Nearly all players donated money for rolls of chicken wire and, with the five ladies assisting, John Ratcliffe and Ed Wadham stretched it between the wobbly poles. It wasn't a huge undertaking, but it was enough of a gesture that the idea to organize a tennis club took hold.

Like all the best cottage traditions, it was a humble beginning. The club was born in 1974 on the Forestell's front porch, when John Ratcliffe was elected president, Dodie Forestell treasurer and Syl Garratt secretary. Donations for maintenance and materials were banked in a coffee tin in Dodie's kitchen. At the end of 1975, the first full year as a club, the bank balance was \$541.12. The first annual meeting was held in July 1976. That year annual dues were \$50 per family and 36 families belonged.

Today, the club enjoys a steady membership base of about 125 families. There are six beautifully maintained courts, a telephone, a portable toilet, and organized round robins, tournaments and lessons for just about everyone. And yes, the original rustic wooden shelter is still in good repair. There have been many milestones over the past 35 years, but the club seems to have found the right balance between changing with the times and keeping it simple.



In 1976 John Hogarth (Richard's son) was the first pro-cum-court-attendant for the whole summer. He looked after the courts, regulated playing time, gave lessons to adults and clinics for juniors, stained the shelter and sanded and varnished its seats. For the first couple of years, the tournament finals and end of season party were at the Hogarth's cottage. Denis Evans arranged for

Joan Klomparens, first winner of the ladies singles trophy donated by the Hogarth and Fasken Families in 1983.



The shelter in 1986. LBTC signs were donated by Denis Evans.

the holes in the courts to be patched, Gene Farley assumed the never-ending job of unpaid auditor and Paul Forestell undertook to handle the legal work at no cost to the club. The club began paying an annual rent of \$300, the telephone was installed and the Lake of Bays Tennis Club was open for business.

The club was incorporated in April 1977 and the by-laws, set up by Paul Forestell, were in place by the start of the 1977 season as were the basic club rules and policies. When Bob and Richard first agreed to the community use of the courts, they stipulated that only people with a cottage on Lake of Bays be eligible for membership. All other rules are changed and adjusted as required.

The Monday and Thursday Ladies' Day round robin has been in force from the beginning (of course!). A Saturday morning Men's Day started — by urgent request — in 1979, followed shortly by the Sunday Men's Day. But times change and with more women in the work force, the ladies needed equal access to the courts on the weekends, so now there are two courts reserved on Saturday and Sunday morning for mixed round-robin play.

In 1980 Paul Forestell and Denis Evans, on behalf of the tennis club, approached Bob Fasken and Richard Hogarth with an offer to buy the property surrounding the courts. Bob and Richard owned the Glenmount property right down to the waterfront that included the former St. Patrick's Catholic Church and the old Glenmount Teahouse which the sailing club had been renting and using as their clubhouse, so the sailing club was invited to participate in the purchase. The joint purchase was finally completed in 1984 for \$40,000, of which the sailing club paid \$15,000 for a portion of the property between the cottagers' road and the new tennis club road. Both clubs owe a debt of gratitude to Bob Fasken and Richard Hogarth for their very reasonable terms. Without their generosity and interest in contributing to the cottage community, we would never have enjoyed such a perfect setting for these two clubs to put down roots and grow side by side. The tennis club gave the Fasken and Hogarth families honorary family memberships in appreciation of their contribution.

The original courts were resurfaced in 1983 and new wire and poles put up (finally!). In 1993 they were torn up and completely redone. Two new courts at the top of the road were built and ready for play in 1988, with the final topping completed in 1989. In 1999 two more courts were added to the courts at the top of the road and a brand new shelter between them provides welcome shade and benches beside what are still called the “new courts.”

The club has been lucky to have the support of many dedicated volunteers who keep the programs and activities evolving. It has been a great place for neighbouring kids to gain their first job experience as court attendants and instructors for the Jelly Bean and junior tennis program. In 1990 the sailing club requested permission to use the courts to start a tennis program for the sailors, which is still running today. Sometimes it's the smallest things that make the biggest difference. Whoever thought of hiring dock attendants to jockey the incoming boats on Monday and Thursday mornings had a keen eye for detail – and keeping insurance premiums to a minimum!

Of the five ladies who founded the club, only Beth Ratcliffe remains an active tennis player. Barb Abel and Syl Garret are both still enjoying their summers at Lake of Bays, but they have retired their racquets. Marge Wadham has been unable to come to the lake for the past two summers due to ill health. Cees McRuer's family cottage was sold years ago and she has since moved away.

In 1995, Beth very wisely recorded the story of how the tennis club began. When Beth was sidelined last summer with a sore knee, I thought it was a good time to record the story somewhere so it doesn't get lost with the passage of time. Most of the words and recollections in this story are Beth's. When I called her this winter for permission to use her notes for this article, she had to cut the conversation short — she was headed out the door to a tennis game. After 35 years as a regular at Ladies' Day, I have no doubt she will be back on the court this summer!

As the daughter of one of the founding ladies (Marge Wadham), I am proud to say that I too head to the courts for every Ladies' Day that I can. In fact, it is the only tennis I play all year and the only place that I play. I like that the club has maintained its casual atmosphere. Bring your own water and the lights go out when the sun goes down. The original wooden shelter is still a favourite place to congregate. And the bouquet of fresh wildflowers that adorn the urinal in the Port-o-Potty for the Ladies' Day tournaments adds just the right touch of elegance.

It's reassuring to see the spirit in which the club began remains today. It's still just about enjoying a great game with summer friends. And it's still thriving because good people are generous with their time and willing to lend a hand. The phenomenon of Ladies' Day. It's how it all began.

Two additional courts were added in 1988.

