



THE MOONLIGHT



Chuck Guarino

What was it like, Papa?

This is the typical question about Grand Beach, that my children and grandchildren ask. I have told them many stories about the wonderful “Golden” days of Grand Beach that I knew as a youth, but they always find new questions to ask.

They were wonderful years. And, I am always very happy to tell them another story. They are amazed to learn that there was no electricity at Grand Beach in those early years. They find it difficult envisioning that there was no road to Grand Beach and that it was very difficult for cars to get there.

The CNR had a coal burning generating plant at Grand Marais that produced electricity for all the CNR properties. These were the large dance pavilion, the boardwalk, all concession stands, the hotel, the dining hall, the station and the station platform, the boardwalk leading to “Halls Boat Livery” on the lagoon, as well as all five washrooms in the campsite.

Since cottages had no electricity, the usual question was “what did the cottagers use for light and cooking? I explain that cottagers used wood burning cook stoves or a kerosene (coal oil) stove. Most cottagers used kerosene (wick) lamps for lighting. Some used Alladin lamps, which had fragile “mantle wicks” and provided a much brighter light. Refrigerators were nonexistent, so each cottage had an “ice-box”.

Every morning, cottagers received a block of ice (one foot square), which they picked up with little wagons at the CNR “Ice House” opposite the railway station.

Everyone came to the beach by train. It was a wonderful experience. On the “Beach trains” people got to know each other and were happy to meet their campsite neighbors, also coming out to the beach.

On each train, there was always a “newsie” who walked through the coaches selling popcorn, drinks, chocolate bars, etc. “Cracker-Jack” (Caramelized popcorn) sold for 10 cents a box. Ice cream cones, chewing gum, chocolate bars, etc. ranged in price from 5 to 15 cents. The train fare for the “Moonlight” was only 50 cents (return), and an Adult (one day) fare cost just one dollar. Often on the moonlight trains, some people would bring along an accordion, ukulele, or mouth-organ, and everyone joined in sing songs.

“Beach trains” began running on May 24th., and ended on Labour Day in September. The CNR provided drinking water for the cottagers via water taps at the corners of each block in the campsite.”.

Each evening, everyone met in the large Dance Hall. Young people danced while the elderly just listened. But, that is another story, which I will describe in a future edition of “What was it like, Papa?”