

Elder Profile: Martha Clemens

Martha was born on March 3, 1918 to Mary Louise Juliette Green and Joseph Stevens. Martha's family lived on the French River at Sand Bay (where Martha was born) for the first six months of her life. Her grandparents were Joseph Green and Sophie Adam, and Joseph Stevens and Harriet Leclaire.

At Sand Bay, her family lived in a small log house. Their neighbours were Philix and Mary-Jane Lariviere, Frank and Jane Ducette, and Micheal and Celine Restoule (Victor Restoule's parents).



When Martha's family moved from Sand Bay, they lived in many places around Lake Nipissing. In the spring, they lived where Mr. Leblanc and Mrs. Leblanc now reside (just outside of Garden Village). This is where the Stevens family lived for the couple of months they required to plant a garden. Once the garden was made, they would camp all summer at different locations to pick berries. Berries were plentiful back then; they sold many and preserved enough to supply the family until the next berry season.

They would travel to Sturgeon Falls to shop. Travel happened by canoe or steamboat in the summer, and by sleigh, horses, or foot in the winter. The families without horses would have to hire someone to take them. In early spring or late fall, dog teams were used because horses were too heavy for the ice. On the way to town, everyone would ride, but on the way home, with the wagon loaded with supplies, everyone walked.

After they picked berries all summer, they would return to the homestead, where they planted the garden. They would dig up the potatoes and other vegetables to prepare them for the winter ahead. All the veggies and berries were brought to their winter home at Wigwam Point.

They followed this pattern for approximately fifteen years.

Then, they moved to Hardy Bay for the next ten years that followed. Hardy Bay is situated approximately one mile between Sand Bay and Dokis Bay. They would travel to Dokis Bay by way of canoe to attend church services. In the winter, they would walk to church. Their house near Garden Village was sold and they planted the garden at Hardy Bay. Now, raspberries were so plentiful then that families from Dokis Bay and town would come to pick them. There were just two families at Hardy Bay. The other family was Andy and Alice Goulais (Denis Goulais' parents). Martha remembers that they had to work hard to survive. Her father worked at a tourist camp as a guide. He helped to start the garden in spring, but was off to work while the rest of the family were left to look after it.

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Tourists bought veggies from them. Martha remembers it being easy in the summer. A board would come twice weekly with groceries. You were able to buy right off the boat or order what you wanted for him to bring on his next round. If you wanted to go to town, he would also take passengers, and you would come home a day later.

Hardy Bay Fishing Club tourist camp was situated on an island about less than 1/4 mile from their house. A boat called Seagull came there daily and they used to paddle their canoe across. Martha's sister, Mary, and her brother, Joe, would sometimes swim across. Very nice childhood memories. The Seagull boat sold groceries, goodies, and brought mail. You could also order from the Eaton's catalogue. Martha remembers cutting a picture of a pair of shoes out from the catalogue that cost \$1.99, and she ordered them.

They moved down the river to Wolelsy Bay for about twelve or thirteen years. Martha, Mary, and their father worked at a lumber camp. Their father was head cook there, Mary cooked desserts, and Martha set and served the tables, and washed dishes. They worked these jobs for about one year, then her dad worked in the bush. Both Mary and Martha did laundry. This is where she met Frank Clemens in October 1944, and they married in May of that same year. The wedding was in Noelville at St. David's church. Frank would work the lumber camp for the winter and the tourist camp for the summer. He also trapped beavers and muskrats in the spring and fall. This was done for twelve years. John, their first born, was born at St. Joseph's Hospital in North Bay. Because there was no hospital in Wolsely Bay, she stayed with her parents in North Bay until she went into labour in hospital. Martha stayed with her parents two months after the birth of John.

Martha's parents lived in Springer Township when she had Kathleen and Juliette. Martha again stayed with mom and dad until she had the girls at St. Jean de Brébeuf Hospital in Sturgeon Falls.

Frank and Martha moved to Springer in 1959, where Martha still lives today. Frank worked as a carpenter and helped build Au Château and the arena in Sturgeon Falls. Frank also built a lot of houses in Garden Village, like the late Richard Goulais, Harry Goulais, and Isidore Beaucage. He also built his own home. He was a very hard worker.

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Martha always sewed her children's clothes. She tanned moose and deer hides before she married. She remembers tanning a small deer hide at the age of 14, all by herself, and was very happy to finish the project. She tanned many hides as well in her married life with Frank. He was a hunter, so the hides were always available. Martha made moccasins and mitts to sell. As the years went by, she bought the hides and did a lot of sewing.

When Martha was asked about schooling, she said she was sent to school by her parents, but the Chief would tell the Indian Agent about them and they would be sent home, because they were not status. She did enjoy attending when she did, though.

Martha's husband, Frank, was from Belgium. He came home to Canada with his family in 1919. Frank died on June 6, 1977, of cancer.

Martha joined the homemakers club in 1960. She enjoyed that very much. She still sews a little, but her love is for travelling. Martha has travelled to the shrine in Midland since 1961, the days when Father Hannin planned this trip. She has not missed a year. In 1976, she started attending the tours to Montreal to visit shrines there; she has only missed four trips. Martha has been to the Holy Land four times. She has been to Egypt, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Israel, to name but a few. She has done a fourteen-day tour of Italy, Paris, and Rome. Martha leads a quiet life. She has a growing family of grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.