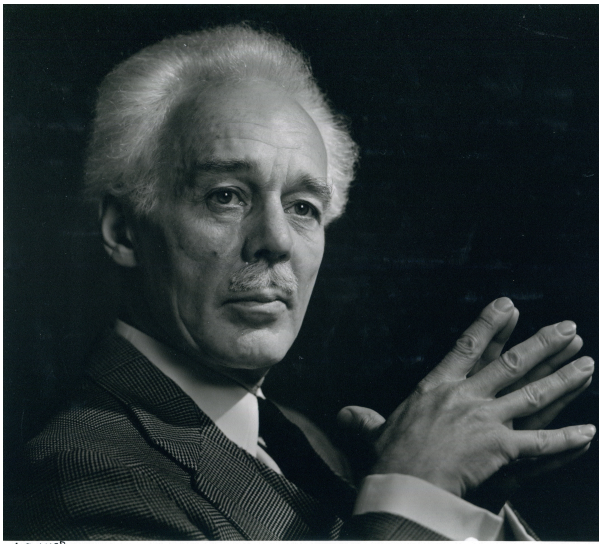


ARTISTS ON THE BAY: Lawren Harris at The Ojibway

By Nancy Lang and Rebecca Middleton

Georgian Bay has provided the setting and inspiration for generations of artists, including Canada's legendary band of 1920's landscape painters, **The Group of Seven**. They often stayed in Go Home Bay, south of Pointe au Baril, at the cottage of their patron Dr. James MacCallum. Many gorgeous paintings were sketched on and near his island, 'West Wind'.¹

Perhaps the most famous member of The Group of Seven is **Lawren Harris** (1885-1970). He was driving force behind the creation of The Group, and his landscapes are some of Canada's most recognized paintings. Actor and art collector Steve Martin recently curated a Harris exhibition, *The Idea of North*², which opened in Los Angeles, traveled to Boston and Toronto. A Harris canvas displayed in the exhibition subsequently sold at auction for \$11 million.



Born into a wealthy family of the Massey Harris farm machinery fame, Harris' patrician manner belied his willingness to hike, battle the bugs, camp in rain & snow to get to the isolated places he wanted to paint.

Photo by Yousuf Karsh

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1. Two favourite Go Home paintings at The National Gallery of Canada are Fred Varley's *Stormy Weather*, <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/stormy-weather-georgian-bay-0>, and A.Y. Jackson's *Night, Pine Island*, <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/night-pine-island>
 2. <http://www.ago.net/the-idea-of-north-the-paintings-of-lawren-harris>

We first learned that Lawren Harris had stayed at the Ojibway Hotel when doing research for *'At The Ojibway: 100 Summers on Georgian Bay'*. Eleanor Kerr and her family had a long history with the Ojibway Hotel - her older brother was the first baby to stay at the hotel in 1908.



Robert Kerr, circa 1914

*Photo from Eleanor Kerr
Morrow Collection*

However, in the summer of 1930, her family was unceremoniously 'booted' from their favourite cottage. Hamilton Davis, the proprietor of the Ojibway, had called with the upsetting news that an artist and his family would occupy Maplewood for the summer. Eleanor's father was not pleased.



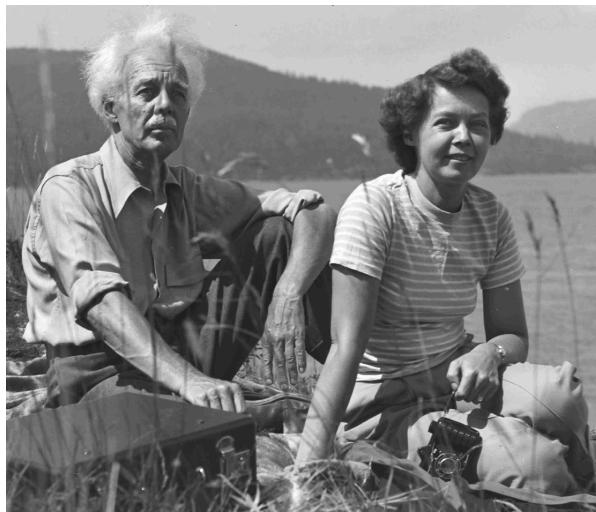
Mr. Kerr enjoying his favourite view from Maplewood Cottage

*Photo from Eleanor Kerr
Morrow Collection*

Eleanor was only ten that summer but remembered the artist's name - Lawren Harris. She watched, with some resentment and curiosity, as he made his way from Maplewood to the dock in the mornings and climbed into a rowboat with his sketch book. Her 22-year-old brother was more welcoming, as the Harris' beautiful 19-year-old daughter, Peggie, accepted his invitations to the Saturday night dances in the pavilion.

Lawren Harris with his daughter Peggie. circa 1940
There are no known photographs of the Harris family stay at the Ojibway in 1930.

Photo from Harris Family Collection



A few years after meeting Eleanor, while researching a documentary about Lawren Harris³, we found letters written by Harris on Ojibway Hotel stationery in the National Archives in Ottawa. Eleanor's story was confirmed!! Imagine our shrieks of joy and the steely glare from the archivist on duty behind her large oak desk. In July 1930, Harris stayed with his family at the Ojibway while making plans for a painting trip to the Arctic with fellow artist A. Y. Jackson. Harris left for the 60-day voyage on *The Beothic*, a government supply ship in late July. His wife Beatrice, children Lawren Jr., Peggie and Howard stayed on at the hotel - at Maplewood, we now know thanks to Eleanor. It was a dangerous journey with perilous storms and treacherous pack ice, so Harris requested that his wife Beatrice be kept informed of the expedition's safe passage.

³ *Where The Universe Sings, The Spiritual Journey of Lawren Harris*, White Pine Pictures, 2016



The Ojibway

HAMILTON C. DAVIS
MANAGER

THE POINT-AU-BARIL SUMMER
HOTEL COMPANY, LIMITED

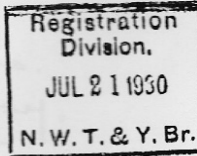
SHIPPING ADDRESS: POINT-AU-BARIL, ONTARIO
FREIGHT OR EXPRESS

LOCATED ON OJIBWAY ISLAND AMONG
THE 20,000 ISLANDS OF GEORGIAN BAY

Ojibway Island, Ont.,
CANADA

July 18/30

Mr. O. S. Finnie,
Director,
Dept. of the Interior,



Dear Mr. Finnie,

I understand that the Department receives messages from the Beothic while she is sailing in the Arctic.

Would it be asking too much if I requested that someone in your office send them on to my wife in whatever modified form they deem necessary? She will be anxious just to hear that all is well with the expedition.

Address all mail Ojibway Island, Ontario.

I hope that this will not involve too much trouble for somebody.
Yours very truly,
Lawren Harris.

July 18th/30

Mr. O.S. Finnie, Director, Dept. of the Interior, Ottawa

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Yours very truly, Lawren Harris

**Patrol Steamer Beothic
Is Buffeted in North**

(Canadian Press Despatch.)

Ottawa, Aug. 21.—After 30 hours of battling with storms, during which the ship was swept by tremendous seas, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police Constable Currie suffered a dislocated shoulder in saving himself from being carried overboard, the Department of the Interior's Arctic patrol steamer *Beothic* safely made the passage across the northern end of Baffin Bay and reached Dundas Harbor, Devon Island, on Aug. 19. Wireless messages received from the *Beothic* indicate that this is by all odds the most stormy and difficult trip the staunch steamship has ever had. She passed through rough weather in the northward dash to Bache Peninsula, and the storm on the southward journey to Dundas Harbor was still worse. The chief concern was for the deckload, especially the motor boats, but fortunately the lashings held and they came through safely.



Lawren Harris and fellow artist, A.Y. Jackson with Captain Falke on board The *Beothic*.



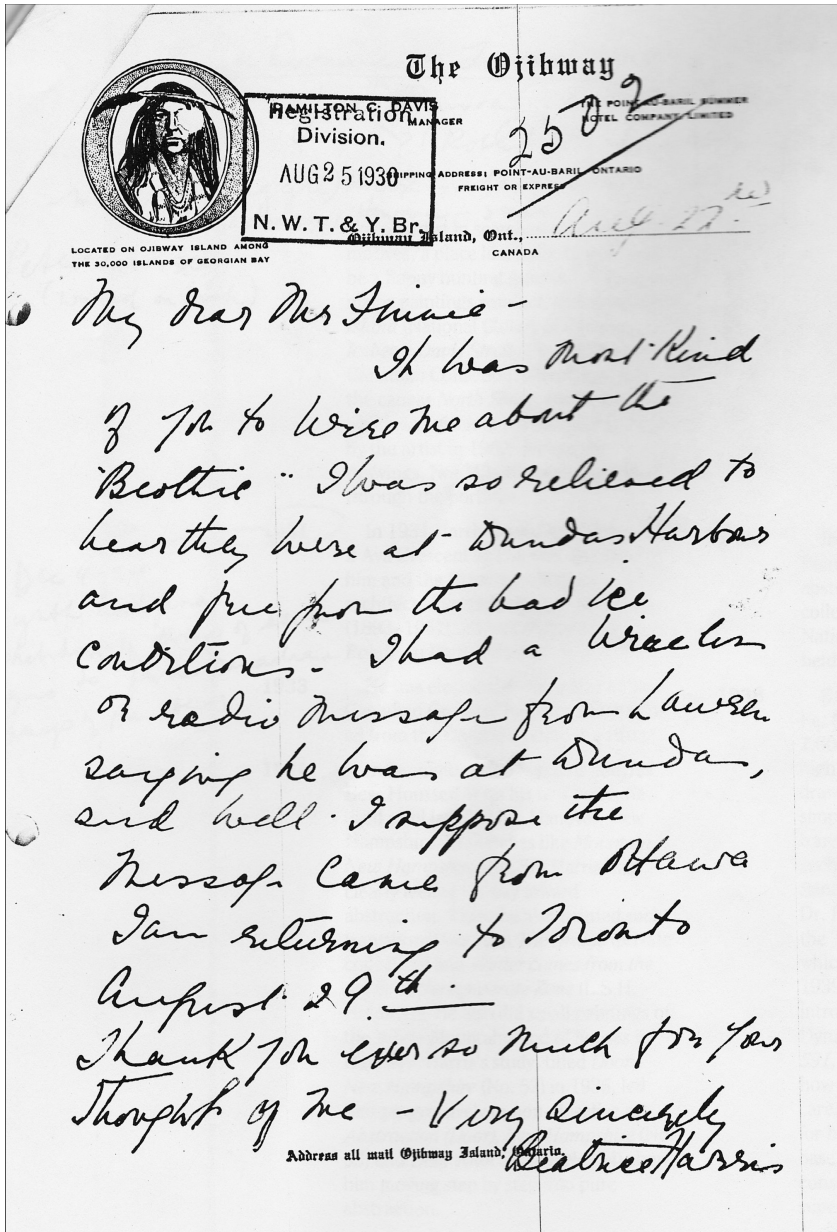
The *Beothic*



Greenland Mountains, 1930, National Gallery of Canada



Icebergs, Baffin Bay North, 1930, Private Collection



August 22nd, 1930

My dear Mr. Finnie,

It was most kind of you to wire me about the Beothic. I was so relieved to hear they are at Dundas Harbour and free from the bad ice conditions. I had a wireless or radio message from Lawren saying he was at Dundas and well. I suppose the message came from Ottawa. I am returning to Toronto August 29th

Thank you ever so much for your thought of me - Very sincerely

Beatrice Harris

Beatrice Harris must have been relieved to share with her children news of their father's safe passage. Though Eleanor recalled seeing Harris setting out with a sketchbook, we have not yet found any Harris paintings identified as Pointe au Baril. We'd like to believe it was because he was spending time with his wife and children before setting out on his dangerous journey.

Harris returned to The Ojibway Hotel the following summer with fellow Group of Seven artist, J.E.H. MacDonald, who did paint Pointe au Baril and left some glorious sketches.