



THE HEROINE OF CHARLESTON LAKE

By Sally Smid

Anyone who has hiked Charleston Lake's Blue Mountain area knows how rugged, dangerous and confusing that terrain is. Now imagine an 8 year old girl travelling perhaps 10 miles in such a wilderness in bare feet, while carrying a 6 month old infant. Caroline La Rose was that courageous young girl known as, the Heroine of Charleston Lake. It was 117 years ago when her family camped near Huckleberry Hollow. Considered a dependable sibling, she was entrusted with her half sister's baby, Bertha, while the rest went berry picking. Caroline walked into the bush with the baby and became desperately lost. After yelling for help to no avail, she began hiking for miles over hazardous terrain to find her way back. Eventually she discovering a deserted shanty and she brought a straw tick and coat down from a loft inside which the pair slept on. She found a bottle as well, and tied on a string to use as a handle. She used it to mix crushed berries and water and fed the baby, always making sure to feed Bertha before herself.

When their disappearance was discovered, an alarm went out and many volunteered to help search. One of the volunteers

was Watson G. Parish, the first reeve of Athens, who had a cottage on Little Bluff Island. He and his son, Arthur, and his engineer, set out in his steam yacht, hoping to find the girls who, by then, had been missing for four days. He somehow felt drawn to proceed into Big Waters despite the turbulent weather that day. Caroline spotted his boat from the shore at Crawford's Point. She had seen others, one containing her sisters, but had been unable to get their attention. She began yelling frantically for help. Parish landed the boat and quickly realized that they were the missing La Roses. Taking them aboard, they travelled to his cottage and were provided with some food and first aid. It was there that she befriended Jessie Arnold, a Parish niece and great granddaughter of Benedict Arnold. Later, Caroline was to name her doll Jessie.

Parish returned the sisters to their small log home on La Rose Bay and met her overjoyed family of 10. Their father, Isaac La Rose, remarked, "I knew they would be found together, dead or alive. Caroline would never leave that baby's side." Caroline had not attended school regularly due to the great distance. Parish asked her father if he would allow her to board

in Athens, to make schooling possible. He thought very highly of his daughter and agreed to this, if she could return for holidays.

It should be noted that baby Bertha was actually the daughter of Leona Brown, her mother's oldest daughter, brought into the La Rose home by her mother, Mary Livingston, when she married Isaac La Rose. At that time there were eight children, but the family did eventually include perhaps 23 children, though some died at early ages. In fact Bertha died at 2 years. Though not well documented, it is thought that Leona was the mother of some of Isaac's children, and Mary, at some point, left Isaac to live with her daughter Lydia Earle in Athens.

When Caroline's story hit local papers, a letter to the editor suggested that funds be donated in her honour. The story later appeared in the Toronto Globe. Reporter Pharos Durand of the Children's Club picked up on the idea and encouraged young readers to donate pennies and nickels, which grew to a fund of \$346.00, with 3000 children from all over the world participating. Parish agreed to pay for her school supplies. There was a committee formed to make arrangements



August 1902, Friends of W. G. Parish (lying in foreground) at the Outlet by Parish's "rescue steamboat": Jo Thompson (grocer) on far left, Nate McVeigh (inn keeper), A. R. Brown, H. H. Arnold (dry goods), Jessie's father, J. P. Lamb (druggist, reeve), G. W. Beach (grocer, general goods) C. S. Lamb, (general merchant)

including the donation of clothing and the appointment of Miss M. Livingston, or perhaps Livingston, of Central and later Victoria Street to be her guardian.

Pharos wrote a variety of articles and came to Athens to visit Caroline, giving her gifts, taking her to the Armstrong Hotel in Athens and then on to Brockville on the B & W Railway. The young girl was overwhelmed, having rarely left her log home. Another writer privately published her story in a booklet entitled *Christina*, which was lovingly dedicated to the Parishes. Caroline also received a gold medal from the Canadian Royal Humane Society in an elaborate program in 1898 at the Athens High School with many dignitaries in attendance. She was presented with an ornate book containing her story and listing the child donors which included Jessie and Arthur. Later there was a fundraising concert and more donations continued in future years.

Caroline LaRose became a successful honour student, graduating from the Athens High School, and then from nursing school in Cornwall. During WWI Lieutenant La Rose served as an honoured nurse in France. She maintained friendships in Athens and even returned to

help care for aging Watson Parish.

After the war she became the supervisor of nursing in Galt, and then Walkerville, where she received various honours before her retirement in May, 1935. She married Dr. J. W. Brien, chief of surgery, on July 31, 1935 and a wedding and reception took place at George E. Judson's home on Elgin St. in Athens. Arthur Parish walked her down the aisle. His ailing father died shortly afterwards. The couple resided in Windsor. Dr. Brien was a quiet widower and father of several children. The Brien's donated the Alter in the Athens Anglican Church in honour of the Parishes. Caroline helped pay for her sister Lydia's son, Thomas Earle, to be educated. He became a successful doctor. They donated the proceeds from the sale of their home to the church before moving to a condo, a niece reported. Having no children of her own, Caroline offered to help fund the educations of family members and for many years there was a Caroline Luella La Rose Scholarship at ADHS. She died in 1977, leaving an inspiring legacy.

The Athens Heritage Society recently came into possession of a scrapbook, letters, documents, and other memorabilia from Watson Parish's former home, known as

the Hill House on Main St. These materials helped the group to learn much more about Caroline and the Parishes which are currently featured in displays in the Athens Museum. This perhaps also influenced the ADHS Alumni to name Caroline La Rose to the Hall of Fame at the recent 2015 graduation ceremony.

Few have ever travelled so far from such an impoverished start as Caroline La Rose did. Her heroism and rescue lifted her from one of the poorest homes in the area and resulted in thousands of donations to fund her education. She went on to gain wealth and status as a hospital supervisor and philanthropist. At that time women were not encouraged to pursue an education or occupation outside of the home. Perhaps as a result of her bravery, resourcefulness and fame, she was to have the chance to go beyond her economic and social level and achieve great success and then "pay it forward". Caroline joins the ranks of other local women like Dr. Lenora Howard King and Louise McKinney who embraced challenges of their own and defied stereotypes, contributing to the world in amazing ways as well! **LH**