

RIVIERA OF THE NORTH:  
BREEZY POINT RESORT, 1920's-1930's



**BY ALVIN HUSOM**

**-1982-**

Digitized 2015

## Preface

The 1920's and 1930's in American history were certainly decades of contrast and noteworthy personalities. The years of prosperity and depression, along with the Coolidges, Valentinos and Dempseys, made for exciting and memorable times.

It is within mileau that Captain Billy Fawcett's Breezy Point was born and grew. A microcosm of the time, it impacted on the central Minnesota area and gave a taste of the "good life". Many of the native people depended on the resort for their livelihood and in turn helped make Breezy Point what it was—the Riveria of the North.

It is to these people, many who are now in their retirement years, that I dedicate this writing. Their generous gift of time and sharing of memories of those by-gone days was most appreciated. In turn, I hope to have recaptured in some small way a part of your lives.

Also, a dedication to Captain Billy Fawcett is appropriate. Through this research and writing I feel that in some way I have met Breezy's driving force. To say the least, his character and actions were notable and are still evident today. So to the former employees and employer I say, "Skool to the Northland, Skool!"

*The author, Alvin Husom, is a resident of Nisswa, MN and is presently employed by the Brainerd school system.*



## RIVIERA OF THE NORTH: BREEZY POINT RESORT, 1920's-1930's

On the western shore of Big Pelican Lake, twenty-five miles north of Brainerd, lies one of Minnesota's more renowned resorts, Breezy Point. For over sixty years it has provided many people with fun filled, memorable vacations. While much of the resort's popularity stems from its extensive and modern facilities, certainly its fascinating history, especially that of the 1920's-1930's has been a contributing factor to its fame.

Breezy Point was born in the early 1920's. Much of this decade, described by historians as "roaring," was a time to enjoy and indulge and get rich quick. A new ethic, "The business of America is business," provided the milieu for the Horatio Algiers and Babbits to make their mark on history. Numerous examples could be found of people who played this rags-to-riches role. Certainly one noteworthy personality was Wilfred H. Fawcett, first recognized in the early 1920's for his writing and publication of *Whiz Bang*,\* a risqué magazine of jokes, wit and "filosophy." Directed mainly at World War I veterans it was quickly discovered and consumed by the general public, rapidly gaining wide circulation.

With his astuteness "Captain Billy," a name traced back to his service in the Spanish-American War and World War I, went on to establish a publication firm in Robbinsdale, Minnesota, producing *Whiz Bang* and other magazines representing various areas of interest - mystery, movies, mechanics, gardening, photography, crime, romance and sports.

The magazine became good sellers due largely to Captain Billy's foresight and promotional ability, and the Fawcett-Publishing Company prospered. Thus, in just a few years, Captain Billy had gone from jack of all trades and holder of three jobs to support his family of five to the manager of a very lucrative business.<sup>1</sup> So prosperous was this business that Captain Billy was able to remove himself from many of the daily tasks of publishing and pursued instead a life of world travel and hunting safaris in Alaska, Africa, Japan and South America.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile in February, 1921 Captain Billy purchased eighty acres of land, a farm home and several cabins on Big Pelican Lake - Crow Wing County, twenty-five miles north of Brainerd and five miles east of Pequot Lakes. His plans were to build additional cabins, divide them among his children and, if the post WWI recession worsened or the new publishing venture failed, the family, through rental of the cabins, would still have a livelihood.<sup>3</sup>

The country and the publishing business, however, continued to enjoy growing prosperity and Captain Billy's "insurance" became instead a new business, Breezy Point Resort. By the spring of 1921 plans were made to con-

\*The name "Whiz Bang" apparently came from a WWI artillery shell which made the sound of whiz and bang as it was shot.

struct more cabins on a bluff for family friends, but other people were soon requesting rental privileges. Apparently, the new economic prosperity, the developing motor age and the references by Captain Billy in *Whiz Bang* to his virgin "northland retreat" attracted many people. As a result twenty additional cabins, each named after a street in Minneapolis (Aldrick-Thomas), were built. Luxury was the mode as their log and frame units were equipped with electric lights, indoor toilets, fireplaces and a sleeping porch.

Nearby a large club house or pavilion was erected measuring fifty-five by sixty-five feet. Inside were a club room, dance hall, refreshment area and a large beautiful fireplace. Also, in response to the growing number of horseless carriages, a filling station was made available. By summer's end seventy to eighty thousand dollars had been spent and plans were being made for future development.<sup>4</sup>

Determining a need for a larger type of accommodation, Captain Billy began construction on what would eventually become part of "The Lodge." This structure consisted of sleeping rooms and a central dining room. Also more cabins (Thomas-Hamline), a barn for riding horses and a workshop for maintenance were added.<sup>5</sup>

By now with two summers of resort experience, Captain Billy was entertaining visions of developing one of the finest recreational resorts in the northland. Being a person who desired to have the best, he sought to develop a retreat where he could offer his friends and visitors the same. His extensive traveling helped provide him with ideas to make the dream a reality.

As 1922 began to wane, work was begun on Breezy Point Lodge. This building, which became a focal point and symbol for the resort, was something of an achievement for its time. The designing, materials, manpower and construction all had their own uniqueness.

Drafting plans for the Lodge were done by the Minneapolis architectural firm of Magney and Tusler, Inc. Its notoriety was exemplified in the Foshay Tower of that same city.<sup>6</sup>

A massive three story Norway Pine log building was soon taking form. The Shevlin-Carpenter-Clark Lumber Company logged the trees near Margie and Mezpah, Minnesota (northeast of Bemidji). Approximately seventy-two railroad flat cars were needed to transport the timbers to Pequot (name later changed to Pequot Lakes), the closest town.<sup>7</sup>

From Pequot, the logs, many of them seventy-five feet in length, were transported by a combination of truck and trailer and some creative hauling ideas.<sup>8</sup>

During the time period from the winter of 1922 to July, 1924, approximately one hundred workers expended many hours of manual labor to make the Lodge a reality. A number of the workers were Finlanders from northeastern Minnesota who possessed special log building skills. They used the scribing and coping technique whereby the upper log was hewn out and then placed on the preceding log creating a cupping effect. Drift pins held the logs together eliminating the need for nails.





*Entrance to Breezy Point in early 1920's.*



*Construction of the Lodge, 1922-24.*

The Lodge, when completed, measured one hundred sixty feet by eighty feet. Its size plus its classy and rustic interior quickly made it the showplace of the area.<sup>9</sup>

Entering the main entrance of the Lodge, a visitor's attention was immediately drawn to the open log interior and inviting lounge. On the walls and supporting braces were numerous mounted heads of big game animals – mountain sheep, deer, caribou, grizzly, Stineback (dwarf deer), cheetah, lion, roan antelope, buffalo, gazelle, zebra, gnu, etc. From all parts of the world, these trophies gave evidence of Captain Billy's successful hunting safaris.<sup>10</sup>

Off to one side one received a welcome from a hotel clerk behind a glass and marble registration desk partially canopied by a huge log staircase which some builders had claimed "couldn't be built." At the top of this stairway hung a ten to twelve foot square wall rug embodying a design of an eagle with arrows clutched in its claws. It contained furs from almost every fur bearing animal in North America. Today the rug would probably be worth tens of thousands of dollars.<sup>11</sup>

Straight ahead of the stairway a warm luxurious dining room invitingly displayed its log motif and other classic features. Down the long room, tables of place settings for several hundred people (up to seven hundred were accommodated at one convention) were aligned. Each setting consisted of a base plate that featured hand painted peacocks (a number of these exquisite birds roamed the Breezy Point grounds), the letters BPL (Breezy Point Lodge) and an inlaid gold border. Costing seventy-five dollars each, no plate was ever washed with any other dish. Instead, careful individual attention was given each plate. Completing the setting were heavy sterling silverware, precisely positioned dark blue goblets, white table cloths and a brightly colored chair to sit on.

Each table on the upper level of the dining room was set apart by a large log chain. On each wall was a split rock fireplace measuring eleven feet wide, five feet thick and, including the upper story of the building, extending forty-two feet high. At the far end stood a stage and facilities for an orchestra with a full sized birch bark canoe hanging above it. Extending from the ceiling were fern plants and iron wrought light fixtures with hued, cone-shaped light shades over brownish tinted bulbs.<sup>12</sup>

The first floor or basement of the Lodge offered a variety of recreational pursuits. A six tabled billiard room, bowling alley, and gambling casino all solicited one's participation. And, if guests desired to enhance their appearance for an evening of dining and/or dancing, there was a barber shop and beauty parlor available.

While ascending to the third story one may have begun to feel the effects of the long travels to Breezy. Appropriately this level provided a lounging area where, while relaxing, one could view more mounted animal heads or marvel at the chairs fabricated from moose antlers and large cushions. On the other hand, if desiring a rest, they could retire to their bedroom and after





*Lodge dining room.*



*This fireplace is eleven feet wide, five feet thick and forty two feet high. Breezy Point Lodge, Pequot, Minn.*

*One fireplace located in dining room.*

indulging in a private bath, a rare offering at the time, dream of the fun-filled days ahead.<sup>13</sup>

The Lodge served its purpose well, but the growing popularity of Breezy Point and the chronic desire of Captain Billy to provide the vacationer with the best resulted in the completion of the "Edgewater Annex" in 1928. The Lodge was now, without question, one of the largest and most elegant log structures in the country.<sup>14</sup>

This annex was connected to the Lodge by the "Deer Writing" room, a place for penning a few lines to friends or business associates back home. The annex contained more bedrooms on the first and second floors bringing the total sleeping accommodations to one hundred and twenty-five.

Many business and civic groups began to hold their annual conventions at Breezy Point. Consequently, some type of large meeting or working room was needed. The third floor of the annex embodied such a place with seating capacity up to six hundred and fifty. Windows lining three sides of this hall gave a magnificent view of Pelican Lake.<sup>15</sup>

Now that his guests were provided for, Captain Billy had a personal summer residence built across from the Lodge. Again utilizing some of the same craftsmen that built the Lodge, Captain Billy designed and modeled his summer home after a Swiss Chateau. The building, often called the Butterfly Cabin because of its shape, was also constructed of Norway Pine.

Park-like grounds of lush green grass, flower beds and professionally built rock walls and stairways surrounded his home.<sup>16</sup>

The interior of the home was as beautiful. Meticulous arrangement of furniture pieces and accessories (many of them collector's items that Captain Billy personally obtained while on his extensive travels) decorated the two-story, log motif living room. Off to one side was a natural stone fireplace which embodied a large heart-shaped stone, centered just above the mantel. Higher up a large and majestic head mount of bull elk stared at any entrant.

On the far end of the living room a circular wrought iron stairway led up to a reading balcony. From here one could satisfy his/her knowledge-hungry mind in the collection of books or just relax and enjoy the Indian wall hangings and view of the living room below.

Off to the right of the living room was Captain Billy's office and den. A little more modern with its knotty pine interior, this room retained a northwoods flavor. Evident were more hunting trophies with large polar bear rugs on the natural pine floor and above the fireplace mantel, while an African lioness sat watchfully to one side. Rich, red leather chairs and couch finished off the decor.<sup>17</sup>

On the opposite side of the living room a short hallway ushered the visitor to the master bedroom. There a custom made canopied rosewood bed and large rosewood chest vied for attention.

Personal guests in the Fawcett house descended a circular stairway to the basement where four bedrooms containing antique honey-maple furniture were located. Personal bathroom with hot water and shower were available.



An unusual ceiling decor of cement and straw (also evident in the Lodge bedrooms) was said to be attractive but a maid's nightmare.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the glamour of these two buildings, the Lodge and Butterfly Cabin, Breezy Point was more than just buildings.

With over three hundred and fifty acres to develop, Captain Billy endeavored to provide the best facilities possible, be they convenience or recreational.

Electricity in many of the rural areas of Minnesota didn't become a reality until the 1930's and early 1940's. Breezy Point, being one of these no power locations, utilized several diesel fueled generators which supplied the facility with lights, running water, sewage pumping and other electrical dependent devices.

Telephone and telegraph service was also installed in the middle 1920's. No visitor or businessperson was ever more than a call away from his or her contacts. Daily postal delivery was also available.<sup>19</sup>

Since many guests came by train to Pequot, chauffeur service was available. In the early days this was by horse and buggy since the roads were often nothing but narrow and deep rutted paths. But with the birth of the "flivver" new roads were soon developed and Breezy's chauffeur drove one of the latest cars.<sup>20</sup>

To those people who wanted to be catered to personally, there was an assembly of fully uniformed maids, waiters, waitresses and bell hops. Many of these "servants" were hired locally and, owing their survival to their employment at Breezy Point, contributed to its personality through their work.

Each year, when the resort was approaching its opening, the employees were brought together in the Lodge and the manager or Captain Billy would give such directives as: Never argue with a guest; they are always right. Pay attention to every comfort and convenience of the guest. Don't play the slot machines or engage in gambling of any kind.<sup>21</sup>

The local employees also personified the ethic of hard work. Coming from families who were early settlers of the area, they had been taught that the Protestant Ethic was not only a means of survival but the way to live.

Many names of members who gave Breezy Point an added touch could be recited, but identification of a few personalities will have to suffice.

Ann Roberts established a notable reputation at the resort. From a rather impoverished background, Ann worked her way up to head waitress at the Lodge. She was of small stature but was often seen carrying heavily loaded trays of food to the dinner guests. Her personality and attractiveness (she was labeled as the Jean Harlow of the area) contributed to her popularity among fellow-employees and guests. Her work often served as an example to her co-workers and the guests rewarded her with generous tips (\$100.00 from one family in the 1930's).<sup>22</sup>

Tom Walsh, better known as "Walsh the Warden," was another noteworthy personality at Breezy. Despite his role of cop, Tom's expansive Irish

character, non-aggressive behavior and amiability brought him much popularity. However, his greatest notoriety came from the practical jokes he liked to play on his colleagues or in some cases the more fun-loving guests.

Once he had some people spread the rumor that nobody was to give Tom a drink because he might suffer from convulsions. Then he, with his friendly persuasion, inveighed a guest to buy him a drink. After several swallows he would go into a fake convulsion routine, letting some stored cherry juice ooze out of the corner of his mouth.

Another favorite joke was walking around the Breezy grounds eating a big red delicious apple and carrying what appeared to be a bag full of the juicy reds. He would generously proffer the bag of "apples" to a guest who, upon reaching into the bag, got nothing more than a lump of horse manure.<sup>23</sup>

Besides the local employees, Captain Billy hired people from other parts of the country. Some of these were professionals in their areas and were probably invited by Billy when he met them on his extensive travels.

One such person was the maitre'd, Louis Steffen, who came to Breezy Point during the summers. Hailing from the renowned Yar Club on Lakeshore Drive in Chicago, Louie was one of the best, equaling "Oscar of Waldorf."<sup>\*</sup>

Louis ran a very disciplined dining room in the Lodge. Personifying the film star Rudolph Valentino, he presented a very trim and dapper image. Every guest was met at the entrance with a beautiful greeting smile and escorted to a table. Louie's personal attention, however, didn't terminate there. He gave the diner the best of service, and the natural click of his heels, clap of hands and bow gave one a feeling of importance.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, one has to add to this list of colorful Breezy characters the hostler and riding instructor, Percy Wykes. A rather short, loud and out-spoken stereotyped Englishman, Percy's jockey-like appearance and colorful English language attracted much attention. Added to this was a background shrouded in mystery. Claiming that he had some royal blood in his veins, Percy would captivate the horse-riding tourists with stories of his hobnobbing with the Prince of Wales and caring for the royal horses in England. He also spoke of being James Jay Hill's coachman. With an English accent his phrases "Those bloody old horses" or "Get your Bloody arses up there" were laughed at and repeated by many people. Percy just had the kind of character that attracted or interested all kinds of people. He, like so many other employees, gave Breezy Point that little extra that helped make it a place to remember.<sup>26</sup>

Other little extras that made Breezy a "classic" resort included the endless number of guest activities.

If one wanted to capture some sun or enjoy a refreshing swim, Breezy Point

*\*Oscar Tschicky (Oscar of Waldorf) was head waiter of the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City. The hotel-restaurant had an international clientele of famous people. Oscar being a very skilled and disciplined maitre'd demanded the same from his subordinates. Many of the workers spoke a foreign language and all were required to memorize the names of the guests.<sup>24</sup>*



boasted one of the finest swimming beaches in the midwest. The deep shoreline, of very fine white sand, ran approximately two blocks in length and extended far out into the swimming area. Paralleling a three hundred and fifty foot dock was a water wheel and a large shoot-the-chute slide which plunged one into the inviting waters.<sup>27</sup>

Boat rides and canoeing were always available for the sightseer but if one wanted a special thrill, it could be had on the "Whiz Bang." Driven by an airplane motor and propeller one zipped across the water in a large flat-bottomed boat at 40 mph.

For the more adventurous, especially in the 1920's, Captain Billy's own plane was always ready to lift one above the towering pines. World War I had given the plane some credibility as a military device but its function as a means of transport was yet to be realized. Therefore, airplanes weren't readily available so its presence at Breezy Point was another special attraction.<sup>28</sup>

More down to earth guests might have enjoyed horseback riding under the guidelines and instruction of Breezy's own hostler.

Catering to the fairway enthusiast there was a well-kept nine hole golf course along with a club house, golf professional and caddies. Then for the more official player, every year witnessed the 10,000 Lakes Amateur Golf Tournament. This competition attracted some of the best players in the midwest - Patty Berg, Lester Bolstad, Harry Legg, Stan Larson and Bobby Campbell.<sup>29</sup>

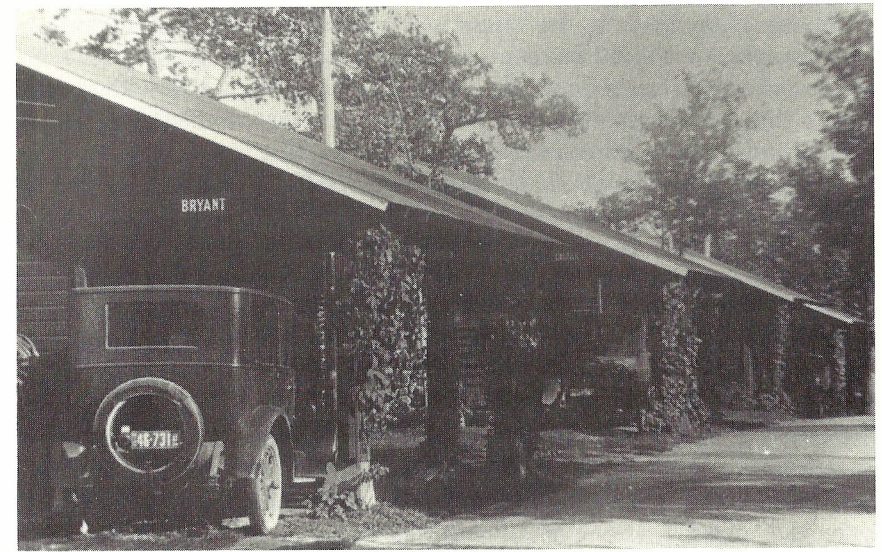
The hunter or marksman was provided with the opportunity to sharpen his/her skills on the trapshooting range. In fact, if one was good enough there was always the challenge from Captain Billy who, after his captaincy of the winning 1924 Olympic trapshooting team, gained international attention.<sup>30</sup>

Along with these activities were other enticements such as fishing, billiards, gambling, ping pong, dancing, bridge tournaments, bowling, tennis, badminton, archery, horseshoe pitching, croquet and shuffleboard.<sup>31</sup> Time spent in pursuing any of these diversions and/or a delicious meal in the Lodge dining room probably left one at day's end in a mood for a relaxing walk around the Breezy Point grounds.

Strolling up the road from the Lodge toward the cabins, a guest was likely to be caressed by the cool and fresh evening breezes that wafted their way over the peninsula.

As one walked on the cottage road, one would be struck by the quaintness of the cabins each bearing the name of a Minneapolis or St. Paul street. One of these, Thomas Cabin, was first lived in by Captain Billy before building his other residence, and also a favorite lodge of some more notable people like Eddie Rickenbacker, the World War I flying ace.

From this location one had a macro view of Pelican Lake and specifically of Mousseau Bay and Gooseberry Island. It was on this isle that Captain Billy had first planned to build a home. However, some question about who



*Guest cabins reflecting Twin Cities street names.*

really had legal ownership of the property steered him away from that idea.<sup>32</sup>

Farther down the road or riding trails that frequented the area, one would have encountered the "Golden Stairway." This rock staircase, an epitome of all the stonework done around the Lodge, Butterfly Cabin and entrance to Breezy, was aptly given this name because of its almost fairy tale like structure and beauty.

The steps didn't lead one to any kind of building but rather into a forest of birch and oak. Expectedly, this led to numerous rumors and stories as to why the stairway had been built. The most credible seems to be that Captain Billy was planning to enlarge the nine hole golf course to eighteen and build an elaborate club house at the head of the stairs. These plans, however, never fully materialized and the stairway remained for many years as the steps to nowhere.<sup>33</sup>

Continuing the walk, one observes the well groomed lawns, shrubbery and the radiance of the many flower gardens.

Rambling along the main entrance road to Breezy Point, any visitor was greeted by sounds of the wild. Somewhat consistent with the northwoods environment, Captain Billy developed one of the largest zoos in the state. Among its inhabitants were elk, bear and deer (purchased from Minnehaha Park, Minneapolis), buffalo, raccoons, eagles, peacocks, lynx, turkeys, rabbits, owls, ducks and geese. This menagerie was not only an attraction for vacationers but lured numerous people from the local area.<sup>34</sup>

Undoubtedly, Breezy Point was one of the largest and most original resorts in Minnesota. Because of that and because of the variety of contacts that Captain Billy had, many prominent people from all walks of life made this



resort a part of their recreational life.

On one of the walls in the lounge of the Lodge one could see a gallery of pictures of some of the more famous personalities that visited there. Minnesota governors Jacob Preus, Theodore Christianson and Floyd B. Olson topped the political representation along with several U.S. Senators and officials from foreign countries.<sup>35</sup>

Then in 1927, as a result of a personal invitation from Captain Billy, Breezy Point was given some consideration by President Calvin Coolidge and the White House as a summer vacation spot. "The accommodations," indicated an area newspaper, "are readily available: The new Fawcett home has all the modern home conveniences. Plenty of space to handle his entourage, reporters, etc. All kinds of amusements and recreation — fishing lakes. Resort has its own inter telephone and switchboard system for efficient communications."<sup>36</sup> The nod though was given to the Black Hills, a favorite retreat of the president, but to even be considered was a credit to and reflective of Breezy Point's eminence. Furthermore, if one wants to deal with some "what ifs," they could dream of Breezy Point rather than Rapid City, South Dakota as being the location for one of "Silent Cal's" few and famous statements: "I do not choose to run for President in 1928."<sup>37</sup>

Well known sports figures were also evident at Breezy Point. The most noteworthy personality was from the world of boxing, the "Manassa Mauler," Jack Dempsey. Captain Billy was an active promoter of boxing in the Twin Cities area in the 1920's and a very close friend of Dempsey. Jack and sometimes his wife, the actress, Estelle Taylor, were received a number of times at Breezy Point.<sup>38</sup>

Other sports personalities were evident — the most popular being Walter Hagen who had won the British Open Championship twice plus many U.S. golf tournaments, and Jimmy Robinson, outdoor sports writer for *Sports Afield*.<sup>39</sup>

Prominent writers and journalists likewise passed through the gates of Breezy Point. Besides some writers from Captain Billy's Hollywood screen magazines, such novelists as Margaret C. Banning, Jane Grey and Sinclair Lewis spent time there. Ms. Banning supposedly gathered observational material at Breezy Point for her book, *Country Club People*, and Sinclair Lewis completed the first half of *Elmer Gantry* while staying at the Bob Hamilton residence on the north side of Pelican Lake. \* He liked to write dur-

\*Bob Hamilton was the manager of the casino at the Lodge for much of the 1920's-30's. He leased it from Captain Billy. Breezy Point became noted for the midnite raids carried out by local law officers. However, the gambling was never stopped until the late 1940's because of warnings that Breezy always received from some unknown source. Upon receiving the tip of an impending raid the gambling equipment would be loaded on trucks, covered with tarps and hauled up to a logging road west of the resort. Dining tables were used to replace the gambling equipment.<sup>42</sup>

ing the day and dine and party at Breezy Point at night.<sup>40</sup>

Captain Billy enjoyed inviting friends to his playground and the recipients of much of this generosity were his newspaper cronies. Prominent reporters such as Charlie Johnson and Dick Cullum from the Minneapolis *Tribune* were several of his favorites.<sup>41</sup>

Representing other parts of society came such people as Charles and Joseph Mayo from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester and numerous entrepreneurs and industrialists from the business field.

When noting the prominent guests at Breezy Point, one can't overlook the movie set. Hollywood really came of age in the 1920's and '30's. The silent flicks followed by the talkies and the arrival of screen stars made the movie world a part of American culture. Fawcett Publishing Company capitalized on this phenomenon and produced several movie magazines. Accordingly, Captain Billy came in contact with many of the stars resulting in a number of them coming to Breezy Point. The register boasted such greats as Fifi D'Orsay, Delores Del Rio, Claire Windsor, Wayne Morris, Jack Benny, Lionel Barrymore, Robert Montgomery, Joan Crawford, Clara Bow, Hans Conreid, Rosalind Russell, John Wayne, Gene Autry, Clark Gable, Carol Lombard and others. Certainly such a list spoke well for Breezy Point and enhanced the image of the resort.<sup>43</sup>

Many business and civic groups, attracted by Breezy Point's extensive facilities, held meetings there. The convention schedule certainly reflected its popularity:<sup>44</sup>

1928—

- Lions (over 1,500 from Midwest and Canada)
- N.W. Theater Circuit (Finkelstein and Ruben)
- League of Municipalities
- N.C. Electrical Ass'n.
- MN Bankers
- State Trapshooters
- Kappa Kappa Gamma
- Delta Delta Delta
- MN Motor Trades
- Kappa Alpha Theta
- Ten Thousand Lakes Championship Golf Tournament
- Loyal Order of Moose

1929—

- No. Central Electric Ass'n.
- Ancient & Honorable Order of Blue Goose
- MN Motor Trades Ass'n.
- R. R. Bixby, Inc., New York City
- Provident Life Insurance
- Northwestern National Life
- MN State Editorial Ass'n.
- Inland Steel Co.



Chicago Advertising Agencies  
Brown & Bigelow Sales Conference  
MN State Bar Ass'n.  
Bixby, Inc. Investment Bankers  
Associated Equipment Distributors  
Buick Pioneer Distributors

Of course, Captain Billy prepared for and accommodated the conventioners in every way possible. Many of them, especially the fraternity groups, came by railroad to Pequot. After being greeted by a Brainerd band, they were transported by car caravan to the resort.

In some cases when there were back-to-back conventions, office staff journeyed to the Twin Cities and boarded the train that the new guests were riding on. This was done to expedite numbers, keys and their location. Meanwhile all the workers at Breezy Point were mobilized and the resort was given a speedy cleaning and preparation for the new arrivals.<sup>45</sup>

From 1920-1933, Breezy, like the rest of the nation played the hypocritical game of "prohibition." Captain Billy, with his many contacts, was able to obtain liquor from a number of sources such as personal friends like Charlie Saunders from the Cafe Exceptionale in Minneapolis. Some was imported from Canada being hauled by truck, or in a few cases, flown in buoyed canvas bags and dropped in the bay by Breezy. Rumor has it that on one occasion, after Breezy's manager had signed for the contents of a freight car at Pequot, the "Feds" confiscated the enclosed liquor and dumped it by the tracks.

Once the "hooch" reached the resort it was usually stored in a semi-secret room in the Fawcett House basement. This liquor was formally served only in the casino located in the Lodge. Access to this area was somewhat controlled.

Other vacationers obtained liquor on their own. The older or more "knowing" golf caddies would earn a little extra money by telling guests they could buy the bootlegged stuff at such places as the "Beer Farm," a small resort south of Breezy. For some of the more spirited conventions, the representatives would bring along their own liquor.<sup>46</sup>

With the demise of prohibition in 1933 the "gaming" ended. At first a number of the employees in the Lodge dining facility couldn't remember or were too young to know how to mix drinks and for awhile a high ball with ice scooped from a tub was the major offering. However, the menu quickly expanded but the earlier glamour and excitement of the "dry years" was now gone and instead Breezy, like the rest of the country, was experiencing a new adventure — the Great Depression.<sup>47</sup>

The "roaring 20's" ended with a bang and society's economic prosperity, fun and frolicking abated. Many businessmen closed their doors and unemployment reached record highs. Likewise Breezy had to weather the depression. Family vacations and business conventions became an exception.

To counteract this decrease in business, reductions were made in the rate

for rooms, cabins and dining room services. If one visited the resort during the time from Memorial Day to June 20th he/she could rent a cottage and eat three meals for \$3.00 per day. For the remaining part of the summer, rates increased to \$9.00 to \$12.00 per person. In spite of the rate reduction, Captain Billy's determination in providing his guests with the best didn't allow for any curtailment of the resort's facilities or services. Even with the economic incentives and maintenance of services the guest list grew very small. During the week it wasn't uncommon to see just several dozen guests and over one hundred workers.<sup>48</sup>

Even in prosperous times the resort was not a money-making business\* and so after a few depression years, Captain Billy began to experience some financial difficulties. The sales of magazines from the Fawcett Publishing House were down and, in the past, that had been a major source of capital for support of the plush resort.<sup>49</sup>

Then, mother nature also delivered her hardship. Although, the north country wasn't in the depths of the "Dust Bowl" the hot and dry summers decreased the size of many of the lakes. Pelican Lake, which provided much of the recreation and beauty for Breezy shrank in size. The large body of water was becoming seven or eight smaller lakes.

The bay area to the north of the resort, which had served as the docking point for the Breezy boats, became so dry that it could no longer be used as a source of water for sprinkling the golf courses. Instead, a large cistern like pit had to be dug.<sup>50</sup>

As a result of the shrinking lakes, a number of property owners, including Breezy Point, formed the Pelican Lake Improvement Association. It formulated a plan to have water diverted via a construction canal from Crosslake, located three miles to the north. After several years of government tape and some local opposition the canal was dug to Long Lake (now Ossawinnamakee) by some area WPA workers. However, by its completion rainfall levels were well on their way to returning Pelican Lake to its former level and the canal, because of its "backward" flow, failed to achieve its objective.<sup>51</sup>

The mid 1930's found Breezy returning to some level of normalcy. The country's economic system was being revived by the New Deal programs, the resort also experienced some changes in that Captain Billy's brother, Roscoe, who was heavily involved in the publishing company became a part of the management of Breezy finances. In addition an extensive media advertising campaign was instituted to entice more people to vacation at the resort and soon talk of the best season since 1929 was being heard. Breezy Point was back on its way to regaining eminence.<sup>52</sup>

Any keen visitor to Breezy during the Fawcett era soon realized that this luxurious retreat was the embodiment of a character or person. To know

*\*Because of Captain Billy's services and facilities, 1929 was the only year that a profit was realized.*



Breezy was, in a sense, to know its founder, Captain Billy Fawcett.

Born in Canada in 1884, Billy moved with his family to Grand Forks, N.D. where his dad established a practice of medicine.



Captain Billy Fawcett, 1884-1940.

At age 15 his aversion to education and a feeling of wanderlust caused him to run away from home. A short time later he lied about his age and joined the U.S. Army to fight in the Spanish-American war. After recovering from an injury Billy was discharged and returned to the Minneapolis area where he engaged in a number of small jobs until returning back to the military during W.W.I. It was during this service that he was awarded the rank of Captain.<sup>53</sup>

Truly a Horatio Alger personage Captain Billy, after establishing the Fawcett Publishing Company and financial security, became an active high liver. He traveled the world many times during his hunting safaris and vaca-

tions and spent considerable time hobnobbing with prominent people including Hollywood personalities. It was during these excursions that he collected many of the personal possessions which adorned the Fawcett house and the Lodge. Also noteworthy were his ostentatious cars such as the custom made Stuts. Bought in 1928 when the average price of a car was about \$500-\$700, the \$8,600 seven passenger, straight eight vehicle had a plush maroon leather interior and a part leather exterior. Many people paused for a look anytime Captain Billy and his chauffeur came by.<sup>54</sup>

Captain Billy could easily have become aloof in his opulence. However, other characteristics of humor, amiability and humanness stood out in his personality.

Captain Billy's humor, which gained much publicity in *Whiz Bang*, could also be noted at Breezy Point. Upon entering the resort one might notice such "confusions" as a speed limit sign saying "Speed Limit 80 mph" (most cars could do about 50 mph at the time), or another sign placed by a large grassy mound which read "Chief Pequot is not buried here." The employees also were the recipients of Billy's wit. Often times he could be heard testing jokes on the workers, thus judging if they should be printed in *Whiz Bang*. Other times, if somebody was being treated to a practical joke, one knew that Captain Billy had played a part in it.<sup>55</sup>

Captain Billy was good to his employees. He knew that the success of his facilities depended on the worker. In a sense he operated on an army basis but more like a benevolent captain. Occasionally he "cracked the whip" but otherwise sought to develop a "family" devotion attitude. Loyalty was an eminent principle to him and a statement by Elbert Hubbard which could be seen in his office portrays it best: "Loyalty — If you work for a man, in heaven's name, work for him! . . . If he pays you wages that supply you bread and butter, work for him . . . speak well of him, stand by him, and stand by the institution he represents . . . I think if I worked for a man I would work for him . . . I would not work for him a part of the time, and the rest of the time work against him . . . I would give an undivided service or none . . . If put to the pinch, an owner of loyalty is worth a pound of cleverness."<sup>56</sup>

Even though Captain Billy had a manager and subordinates to oversee the employees and their work, he could often be seen riding his horse or walking around the grounds in the morning. This was his way of observing the resort operations, the workers and general conditions of the facilities. If he saw anything that wasn't being done right, he was quick to reprimand the worker or maybe use the army approach and lecture everyone for a few people's mistakes. However, his jaunt around the grounds also provided him with the opportunity to get to know the workers. He liked to question them about what they were doing and often joined in with the work for a short time.<sup>57</sup>

Over on the golf course, if it was a slack time, Captain Billy on occasion would sit down with some of the caddies and play a cheap game of poker



(pennies) with them. If he won most of the pot he would always give the boys a dollar or two and send them over to the snack bar.<sup>58</sup>

Besides the personal contacts, Captain Billy also set aside one or two nights a week for a dance in the pavilion for the employees. He also gave them, during slack periods, free golfing and boating privileges.<sup>59</sup>

This benevolence didn't limit itself to just Breezy Point. Captain Billy also gave to or supported various Pequot-Breezy activities. When the new Cole Memorial Hall Community Center was built in Pequot he gave \$200.00 to purchase chairs. At other times he sponsored and financed a county wide picnic and games for anyone who wanted to come. Captain Billy associated with the richer and more popular people of the times, but he never forgot those people that he met who were of a different social-economic level. His stock and trade was people and he made friends with almost everyone.<sup>60</sup>

As indicated previously, Captain Billy and Jack Dempsey were close friends and the "Manassa Mauler" visited Breezy a few times. On such occasions Captain Billy would invite a few of the employees or area people to a party to introduce them to the special guest.<sup>61</sup>

Captain Billy's friendliness surfaced no matter where he went. Jimmy Robinson, outdoor sports writer for *Sports Afield* shares the time when, shortly after the opening of Charlies Restaurant in Minneapolis, Captain Billy called him from Breezy Point and asked him to make dinner reservations for ten and to invite those ten. One of the people on the list was Cock-eyed Turner, who was a permanent fixture from skid row. He was an old friend of Captain Billy's from his early days in Minneapolis but they hadn't seen each other in a number of years. Several days later Jimmy returned a call to Captain Billy and indicated that all the arrangements were completed but that he found Cock-eyed to be a real mess with hardly any clothes. Captain Billy told Jimmy to buy him a whole new outfit and see to it that he was at the dinner.<sup>62</sup>

Captain Billy was never too good for anyone. Charlie Wallace, a former barber for him in Robbinsdale, said "Fawcett didn't let his money make him uppity. He was the same old guy, didn't make any difference if you had a dollar or five million dollars — he was the same."<sup>63</sup>

Beyond Captain Billy's humor and basic friendliness there was another feature that maybe few people fully realized.

In his more reflective moments, he expressed concerns about his lack of real close family life. One time while on one of his morning walks, Captain Billy stopped by the carpenter shop and asked Alfred Kline, a caretaker at Breezy, to go with him on his walk. A short time later they were sitting on a log and Captain Billy talked about his early marriage and what he had lost by divorcing his first wife. He also noted that the business world, despite its excitement and glamour, didn't compare to the serenity that he found in the wilderness around Breezy.

Then in one of his latter years, Captain Billy and his third wife returned to Breezy during the holiday season. At the time Alfred Kline and his family

were occupying a house at Breezy. On Christmas all of the family had gathered together for the traditional festivities. Unexpectedly, Captain Billy and his wife stopped by the house. Mrs. Kline was surprised by the visit and somewhat uncomfortable with the fact that the entire family and grandchildren were all "using" the house. Captain Billy, refusing to hear any explanation, told her not to be concerned, that it was okay. He then stepped in to greet the family and was immediately shaken by the homey nature and closeness of the get-together. While the children opened gifts, tears welled up in his eyes and he said "By all means, always let your family come here. This is so beautiful."<sup>64</sup>

Finally, portraying these characteristics and others, Captain Billy received due consideration when a number of prominent Minnesota newspapers and civic leaders talked about selecting an outstanding citizen for the state. This was to be a person who through his activities and personality would portray the real "Minnesota." Although the award, because of the difficulty of reaching a consensus, was never given, Captain Billy received much attention and it certainly lends credence to the greatness of the man.<sup>65</sup>

In many respects Captain Billy lived life in the "fast lane." Besides being a real competitor in the business world, he also liked the gay, party life of the social world. His restless and tireless nature caused him to push a hundred years into fifty-five and in the last couple years of the 1930's, the effects of that life began to take their toll. As before he would spend time in the summer at Breezy, but now he stayed more around the Fawcett House and took things at a slower pace. He liked to sit by the window and talk with his house boys as they went about their daily tasks.

In late January, 1940 Captain Billy, while staying in Hollywood, contacted his four boys and one daughter and asked them to come to California. To his daughter he also requested her to bring the children's mother — Captain Billy's first wife. While together they played golf and bridge and generally enjoyed the only time that the family had spent together since the divorce in the late teens.

It was during this time that Captain Billy despite his seemingly good health and spirits was taken ill on February sixth and died on February seventh. However, despite the suspicion that there might have been some premonition, it is important to note that he kept living in the Captain Billy spirit with the purchase a week earlier of a new Cadillac and preliminary plans to take a trip to the Phillipines.<sup>66</sup>

The next two years, Breezy Point was operated by his sons. However, they were all active in the Fawcett Publishing Company and despite their working experience at the resort, really didn't have strong desires to continue with the business. Coupled with this was W.W.II, resulting in the closing of the resort from 1942-1945. In 1946 it was sold and the Captain Billy/Breezy Point era was ended.<sup>67</sup>

By all criteria Captain Billy had developed one of the most luxurious resorts in the midwest and even the country. He loved the peace and serenity of



the north country and he wanted others to enjoy it, too.

In the summer of 1927 Breezy Point hosted a national Phi Beta Phi fraternity convention. Some time after the meeting was over, the organization in its official publication, "The Arrow of Phi Beta," made the following comment about Breezy Point's accommodations:

"There in the heart of Minnesota's land of 10,000 lakes, 150 miles from the Twin Cities, where the wood and waters are rich in the lore of the Chippewas and the Sioux, with the romance of the frontier days still haunting the region, Phi Beta Phis from every section of the country enjoyed to the utmost the stay at Breezy Point Lodge, which is without question the finest, most complete, most luxurious resort in the entire lake country."<sup>68</sup>

A short distance from the Butterfly Cabin one would have seen a sign which read:

From this flowing bowl  
Drink deep the warrior's soul  
Skoal to the northland, skoal!<sup>69</sup>

Placed there more as a reflection of Captain Billy's humor, maybe it is fitting to say that it was an appropriate toast to Breezy Point - The Riviera of the North.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Roscoe Fawcett, Personal Interview, Brainerd, MN, Summer, 1982.
2. Charles Johnson, Personal Interview, Minneapolis, MN, Summer, 1982.
3. Fawcett, Summer, 1982.
4. Pequot *Review*, July 1, 1921, p. 1.  
Pequot *Review*, August 16, 1929, p. 1.
5. Roy Johnson, Interviewed by J. W. Trygy, Ely, MN.
6. Pequot *Review*, August 16, 1929, p. 1.
7. Pequot *Review*, August 16, 1921, p. 1.
8. Iver Knutson, Personal Interview, Pequot Lakes, MN, Summer, 1982.
9. Pequot *Review*, August 16, 1929, p. 1.
10. Wilford H. Fawcett, *My African Notebook*, (Dearing Printing Co., Louisville, KY, 1936).
11. Fawcett, Summer, 1982.
12. James Skog, Personal Interview, Crosslake, MN, Summer, 1982.  
James Skog, Personal Interview, Minneapolis, MN, Summer, 1982.
13. Johnson Interview.
14. Johnson Interview.
15. James Skog, Summer, 1982.
16. Ila Smith, Personal Interview, Pequot Lakes, MN, Summer, 1982.
17. Eve Read, "Chateau at Breezy," *Golfer & Sportsman*, September 20, 1941, pp. 44-5.
18. Advertising Booklet, Breezy Point.
19. Brainerd *Daily Dispatch*, July 8, 1921, p. 3.
20. Art Nickels, Personal Interview, Pequot Lakes, MN, Summer, 1982.
21. James Skog, Summer, 1982.  
Brainerd *Daily Dispatch*, July 3, 1929, p. 4.  
Lela Dimmick, Personal Interview, Pequot Lakes, MN, Summer, 1982.
22. Fawcett, Summer, 1982.  
Paul Read, Personal Interview, Brainerd, MN, Summer, 1982.  
Dimmick, Summer, 1982.
23. Fawcett, Summer, 1982.  
Dale Headlee, Personal Interview, Pequot Lakes, MN, Summer, 1982.  
Elsie Stensrud, Personal Interview, Brainerd, MN, Fall, 1982.



24. Brian McGinty. *The Palace Inns*, p. 181. (Harrisburg, PA, 1978).
25. Dimmick, Summer, 1982.  
John Skog, Summer, 1982.
26. Headlee, Summer, 1982.  
Fawcett, Summer, 1982.  
Dimmick, Summer, 1982.
27. *Pequot Review*, August 16, 1929, p. 1.
28. *Pequot Review*, May 19, 1922, p. 1.
29. *Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, July 3, 1929, p. 5.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, July 1, 1931, p. 6.
30. Jimmy Robinson, Personal Interview, Minneapolis, MN, Summer, 1982.
31. Advertising Booklet, Breezy Point.
32. Fawcett, Summer, 1982.
33. Bill Nickel, Personal Interview, Pequot Lakes, MN, Summer, 1982.
34. *Pequot Review*, December 7, 1923, p. 1.
35. *Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, August 16, 1924, p. 7.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, June 10, 1929, p. 7.  
*Pequot Review*, July 3, 1931, p. 6.
36. *Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, March 16, 1927, p. 4.
37. Harold Faulkner, *From Versailles to the New Deal*, pp. 304-5, (New York, 1950).
38. *Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, May 22, 1930, p. 9.  
Leonard Risness, Personal Interview, Brainerd, MN, Summer, 1982.
39. *Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, July 13, 1925, p. 8.
40. *Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, September 14, 1924, p. 7.  
Mark Schorer. *An American Life: Sinclair Lewis*, pp. 454-5. (New York, 1961).
41. Robinson, Summer, 1982.
42. *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 3, 1939, p. 1.  
*Minneapolis Tribune*, July 4, 1939, p. 1.  
Jim & John Skog, Summer, 1982.
43. *Crow Wing County Review*, July 27, 1939, p. 2.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, July 31, 1929, p. 1.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, July 31, 1938, p. 1.  
John Skog, Summer, 1982.  
Eddie O'Day, Personal Interview, Brainerd, MN, Summer, 1982.

44. *Pequot Review*, March 8, 1929, p. 1.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, June 11, 1928, p. 6.
45. Smith, Summer, 1982.  
Lyle Dow, Personal Interview, Brainerd, MN, Summer, 1982.
46. Erv Musolf, Personal Interview, Pequot Lakes, MN, Summer, 1982.  
Dow, Summer, 1982.  
John Skog, Summer, 1982.  
Fawcett, Summer, 1982.  
Max Slocum, Personal Interview, Pequot Lakes, MN, Summer, 1982.
47. Dimmick, Summer, 1982.
48. *Pequot Review*, July 17, 1931, p. 4.  
Fawcett, Summer, 1982.  
Smith, Summer, 1982.  
John Skog, Summer, 1982.
49. Robinson, Summer, 1982.
50. James Skog, Summer, 1982.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, October 17, 1930, p. 1.
51. *Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, May 5, 1933, p. 5,8.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, Nov. 16, 1935, p. 1.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, May 1, 1937, p. 1.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, August 12, 1936, p. 1.
52. Fawcett, Summer, 1982.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, August 11, 1936.  
*Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, July 12, 1935.
53. Allan Adams, Interviewed by M. Monson, September, 1936.  
Crow Wing County Historical Society.
54. Musolf, Summer, 1982.  
Skog, Jim and John, Summer, 1982.
55. Fawcett, Summer, 1982.
56. *Forty Years of Progress, 1919-1959*, Fawcett Publications, Inc.
57. Musolf, Summer, 1982.  
Dimmick, Summer, 1982.  
Ed Bye, Personal Interview, Pine River, MN, Summer, 1982.
58. Knutson, Summer, 1982.
59. James Skog, Summer, 1982.
60. *Crow Wing County Review*, June 24, 1937, p. 1.  
*Crow Wing County Review*, August 30, 1935, p. 1.



61. Leonard Risness, Personal Interview, Brainerd, MN, Summer, 1982.
62. Robinson, Summer, 1982.
63. Minneapolis Star & Tribune, July 7, 1983, pp. 6, 15.
64. Dimmick, Summer, 1982.
65. Erskine, Caldwell. *Afternoons in Mid-America*, (Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1976). p. 119-20.
66. Brainerd *Daily Dispatch*, February 7, 1940, p. 1.  
Fawcett, Summer, 1982.
67. Fawcett, Summer, 1982.
68. Brainerd *Daily Dispatch*, June 11, 1928, p. 14.
69. James Skog, Summer, 1982.