

The Green Cottage – Big Cedar Lake

**Virgil Poling and Frank Williams – the Rochester
Connection**

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The green cottage on Dean Island shortly after its purchase from Virgil Poling by Frank Williams. Storms and age have taken many of the trees.

...an educated person must understand at least the basic mechanical processes commonly used in our industrialized society; that work with our hands is part of our tradition and thus a dignified procedure; that the ability and desire to invent or create are necessary and important steps toward the development of a national culture and the discovery and

maintenance of human dignity. ---Virgil Poling in Craft Horizons...What? (1941)

Virgil Poling, of Hanover, director of the Student Workshop at Dartmouth College...is not only a very skillful designer and worker in wood but a teacher and writer of wide influence, and an authority in the properties and uses of the most widely employed handicraft material in New England. Mr. Poling has helped many craftsmen outside the Dartmouth campus through his page in Craft Horizons, "The Woodworker Suggests," and his other writings. ---Arthur H. Eaton, Handicrafts of New England (1949)

"There is no sweeter solace in life for human ills than craftsmanship; for the mind, absorbed in its study, sails past all trouble and forgets them." ---Amphis

Virgil Poling a Man of Many Parts

The Green Cottage, known by some folks as the Hobbit Cottage, on Dean Island in Big Cedar Lake, Peterborough County, Ontario was built by Virgil Poling, "a man of many parts" as they say. He was a talented craftsman, teacher and administrator. The Green Cottage is a testament to his skill and love of nature and cottage country.

Virgil was born to Jasper and Meda Thompson Poling in 1908 on a farm in Perry Township in the hills of Hocking County, Ohio. When he was 11 or 12 the family moved to Tarlton near Circleville, Ohio. Virgil's grandfathers were both farmers, one loved working the soil and the other preferred raising animals. Virgil once said, "Today, my family would have been regarded as poor, but we didn't know that then. We were very rich, because we lived in the country. And I enjoyed many acres to play on and roam. I had a good childhood."¹

Virgil was a precocious child and was interested in learning everything he could. He devoured books and loved school. His father followed many career paths, as diverse as managing his own photography studio and gallery to working on grain threshing crews. Some of this seems to have rubbed off on Virgil for, even as a young boy, he was captivated by the world of work. He was especially fascinated with those who created and produced things with their hands as opposed to working in a factory or in a shop.

As a boy, he was enthralled by the artistry and work ethic of the local blacksmith and spent a good deal of time hanging around his shop. The blacksmith became a good friend and mentor of young Virgil, and he spent many hours watching the skilled man perform his wonders. From time to time, the smith would let Virgil try his hand at forging and shaping metal, which he loved.

I remember that he was getting pretty old, so he would let me help him bend the rims and so forth. I admired him more for his independence and his workmanship than anything else. Mainly his independence, because this was at a time when one person didn't do everything. They started factories, and he'd gone to Columbus because he heard they were paying big money to people to make

¹ Brown, Robt. "Oral History Interview with Virgil Ellsworth Poling," 1980.

carriages. They put him on a lathe, making a hub, and he made a hub, three or four hubs, and then he went to the foreman and asked him when he could make the rest of the buggy. The foreman said, "But you don't. You're just going to make hubs." He said, "Oh, no, I'm not." "I'm going home to make the whole buggy." And he did. He never worked any longer. There wasn't a lot for him to do, but he was busy and happy. So that gave me a little respect for craftsmanship.²

Virgil also was beguiled by a family of carpenters who lived in his neighborhood. As a young boy, he showed up at their job sites so often that they soon let him help by handing them materials and tools as they worked. Each member of the family had a different carpentry forte and as Virgil grew older, he became a part of the team, learning the specialties that each did. These were talents that he would hone all his life and one day teach others and use to build the Green Cottage.

There was little work done by hand that Virgil wouldn't attempt and couldn't master. So in his formative years, Virgil developed the beginnings of a philosophy that highly valued the creation of usable and beautiful objects by using one's hands. To him, this creative process was important in becoming a whole human being and it informed his philosophy of education.

After graduation from high school, Virgil attended Ohio Wesleyan University in Westerville, Ohio. He was active in college activities there and even played trombone in the college band. As a junior, he transferred to Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio and majored in English. During his college years, Virgil was a voracious reader and thought he might want to be a reporter. He took some courses in journalism, thinking he might work on a newspaper. He also tried his hand at freelance writing but never made much money at it, but he did sell some stories. He graduated from OSU in 1930 smack in the middle of Great Depression. One of his professors thought he'd make an excellent teacher and suggested he go east and take a job at the Hamden Hall Country Day School in New Haven, Conn.

While teaching at Hamden, Virgil attended graduate school at Yale. Majoring in art, he took mostly art history courses. In 1933, He took a position as an art teacher at the Harley Country Day School, a prep school in Rochester, NY. While teaching there, he met musician Esther Coit and they wed in 1934. On the marriage license he listed his occupation as "artist."

Virgil took his new bride to the brand new, fashionable Normandie on Alexander Street. Their apartment was in the near-east end of downtown Rochester, a great location then as now. At the time, the apartments were high fashion but with time they became a bit seedy and most definitely showed their age. In the late 1980s, the Normandie Brownstone was a hangout for the notorious psychopath and serial killer Arthur Shawcross. He was a fat, graying old man who rode a little girl's bike and who had a sixth sense for finding and preying on vulnerable women. Known as the Genesee River Killer. Shawcross lived next door, but he was a familiar figure on the Normandie grounds.^{3 4}

² Brown. Op. cit.

³ *Arthur John Shawcross (1945-2008), the Genesee River Killer. His first known murders were in 1972 when he killed a young boy and a girl in his hometown of Watertown, New York. Under the terms of a plea bargain, Shawcross was allowed to plead guilty to one charge of manslaughter, for which he served 12 years of a 25-year sentence. He killed most of his victims in 1988 and 1989 after being paroled early, which led to criticism of the justice system. A food service worker, Shawcross trawled the streets of Rochester in his girlfriend's 1984 sky blue Dodge Omni (later using her blue-grey 1987 Chevy Celebrity), looking for sex workers to abduct. He was said to have participated in cannibalism and necrophilia. ---Wikipedia*

⁴ <http://www.aeolus13umbra.com/2012/04/arthur-john-shawcross-monster-on.html>

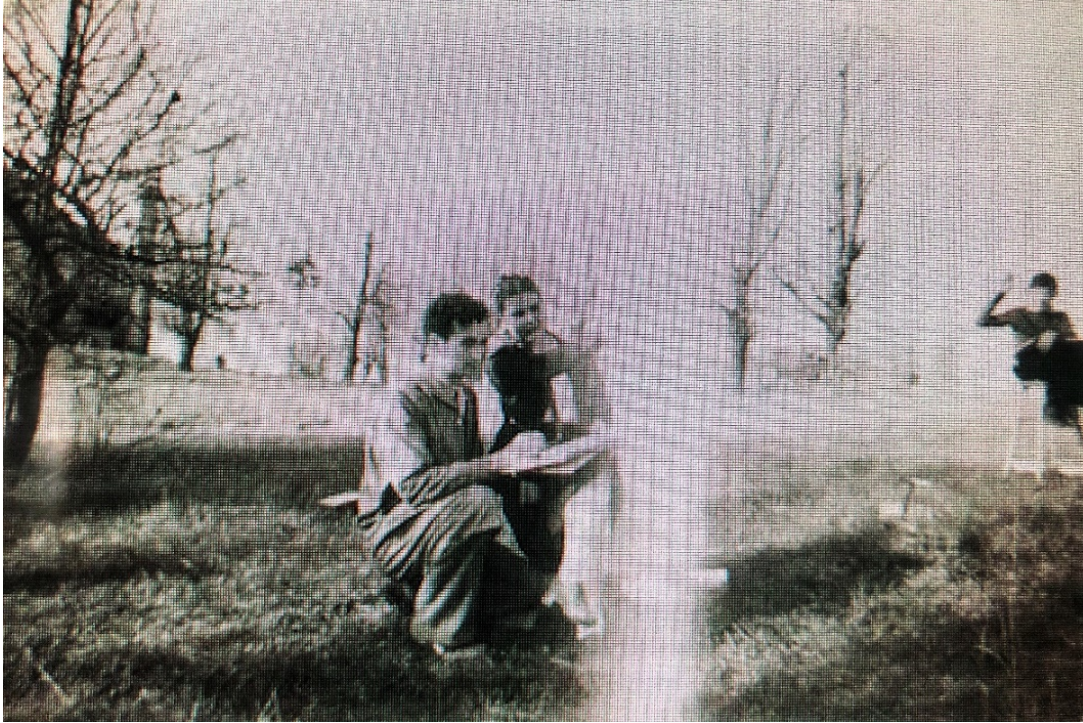
Virgil married well, as they say, because his bride's family was a prominent one in Rochester. Esther's father, Frederick Coit, was a respected Rochester attorney and devoted alum of the University of Rochester. The Coits still have a strong attachment to the U. of R., with five generations having graduated from the university. When he was an undergraduate, Esther's father founded the school's basketball program and was a player-coach. Esther's mother, Lottie Ellsworth was the first woman violinist in the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, and she was on the faculty of the prestigious Eastman School of Music. Frederick Coit's cousin was Margaret Warner for whom the University's well-regarded Warner School of Education is named. Esther's grandfather was Charles Pierpont Coit. For twenty-four years, he was pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church in Rochester.



Virgil Poling poses with the faculty of the Harley School in 1934. He is in the back row, extreme right.

As an art teacher, Virgil used an entirely creative approach, taking a personal interest in his students and getting everything out of them he could. He painted and sculpted along-side them; he didn't just ask them to do an assignment, he joined them. The Harley Day School hired him to teach courses in art history to high school students, but he insisted upon having some courses where students could do studio work. Finally, the school gave in.

Virgil arranged one period in the morning, and one period in the afternoon, an hour and a half each, when he could work with any students who wanted to do studio work with him. These classes would have normally been Virgil's planning periods, but he wanted very much to work with budding artists. He began with a few students but eventually he had so many of the older boys outside doing watercolors that the school couldn't field a football team. He was successful because he worked along with his students, and it was obvious to all involved that he really enjoyed what they all were doing.



Virgil Poling sketching with one of his students at the Harley School

Virgil had them sit down and paint something and always gave them encouragement on how to go about it, for instance, he'd tell them how a certain paint behaves, or he'd show them how to use a certain brush. Though he didn't hold his students up to high standards, amazingly good work came from this method. In those days, Rochester had a very active art scene, and he made certain that his students were well-represented in exhibits all over town. Of course, given his method, he included his works along with those of his pupils.⁵

Virgil encouraged his students to avoid making exact photographic copies of what they were seeing. Once, one of his students said, "Oh, I wish that cow over there would move into the picture so I could paint her." Virgil, seeing the teachable moment, replied, "Move her in...put her in."⁶

At about this same time, during his Harley years, Virgil began obtaining tools and crafting things, furniture and so forth. Making furniture soon became a big part of his program. He didn't realize it at the time, but the stage was being set for one of the most productive periods of his life.

The Deans of Dean Island and Toronto

During the first year of his marriage to Esther, Virgil and his parents Jasper and Meda Poling of Chillicothe, Ohio began negotiations with Edith Ellen Dean to purchase Dean Island on Big Cedar Lake in the province of Ontario. Miss Dean had been a Canadian army nurse in the Great War and was the sister of John Gibbons Dean (1874-1929). Their parents were Thomas

⁵ Brown. Op cit.

⁶ Ibid.

Dean and Margaret Scott. I suspect Virgil Poling's friendship with Rochester Community Players art director, Milton "Robbie" Robinson art led the Polings to Big Cedar Lake.

John Dean had received a government patent for the island in July of 1908. In that year the Canadian Government passed the Volunteer Veteran Land Bounty Act that offered veterans of the Boer War 320 acres of land or 160.00 in script. It seems likely that the 125-dollar payment John made for his island came from this grant. Right from the start. Jack Dean began sharing the island with friends and relatives. In 1909 his brother Ed Dean and a friend spent their vacation fishing from the island. In those days,

The first cottage owner on Big Cedar Lake was a civil servant from Toronto named Clarence Bell. He became so enamored with the beauty of Big Cedar (Burleigh) Lake that he attempted to buy all the available lands surrounding it from the Crown. Failing to do that, he purchased the easternmost island in 1898. A decade later, he also obtained portions of the south shore and four points on the north shore on the eastern end of the lake. He named the island Sybil for his daughter. Bell commissioned Fred Bolton to erect a two-story log cabin. In 1921 he sold the island and cabin to Herbert Richard Holt.⁷ By that time, had a summer place on Juniper Island on Stony Lake.

Jack Dean was a familiar face at Holt's Island. Herbert R. Holt, a bachelor, loved to entertain friends and family. Many of his companions were, like Holt, veterans of the Boer War. They often met on Holt's Island to enjoy the wilderness setting and share wartime reminiscences. Jack Dean was also a Boer War veteran and was one of Holt's friends. Other members of the Boer War Big Cedar set were Andrew Lewis, Robert Herrick (Heric), and Tom Ingrahm. Lewis bought property on Big Cedar and his descendants are still on the lake. Holt, a founding member and long-time officer, was active in the South African Veterans Association of Toronto. After Holt's death in 1951, the island and cottage eventually passed on to sister – Marjorie Heric.



Boer War companions on Holt's Island. Jack Dean, owner of Dean Island, is second from the left. Circa 1926. Note the military airs of the Union Jack on the stern of the boat and the flute player. Photo provided by Michael Mulgrew.

⁷ Lavery. P. 70.

Five of the Big Cedar's remaining habitable islands came up for sale in 1908. The islands originally bore the names of their owners: Dean, Magill, Downer, Sill and Davis Islands. At the time, William R. Davis purchased his island, he was an inspector for the Toronto Police Department and the head of Division One Headquarters. He had a long and distinguished career with the department having first joined in 1879. After eight years he became a detective, in 1902 he was made sergeant and by 1905 he had achieved inspector status. He was known as "Big Bill" or "Will" and was a tough, honest, competent, and genial officer. After retiring from the Toronto force in 1912 he became first, the police chief of Lethbridge, Alberta and later, deputy chief of the Edmonton Police Department. Davis Island eventually reverted to the Crown, possibly because its owner had moved to Alberta. It was purchased by James I. Smith in 1924. He in turn sold it to the Austin and Prince families the following year. Now known as Austin Island, it has been owned by the Austin family for over a century. The original cottage is long gone but new cottages were erected in 1957 and 1963.⁸

Robert Bert Magill gave his name to another of the lake's islands. Magill, like Herbert Holt, was a book binder. Later he served as a civil servant as the Assistant King's Printer in Toronto. After Magill, the island had many subsequent owners: Manning, Wilson, Thompson, Vector and Barr. Today (2024), Magill Island belongs to Leo D'Sorcey.

Records and Toronto news articles indicate that early island families were on friendly terms and many hailed from the same section of old Toronto in the Casa Loma area. These early lake dwellers were made of stern stuff. They favored camping, cooking outdoors, swimming, fishing, hunting, canoeing and row boating. For many years, their islands bore no structures save for perhaps an icehouse. When Big Cedar was first "settled" the auto was in its infancy and the roads around Big Cedar Lake were primitive and sparse. 1909 was the first full summer they could enjoy their islands, so the islanders would have taken the train to Peterborough and caught a steamboat up to Mount Julian. There they would have hired a cart to take them via the Burleigh Road to Haultain where they then took the McCauley Road, which terminated at McCauley's Meadow at the east end of the lake. After traversing down a path, they could then row to their properties. If they arrived late in the day, they could always stay overnight at Mt. Julian or at McCauley's Hotel in Haultain and get a fresh start in the morning. I wouldn't be surprised if the island families arranged to arrive together to help share the burdens and joys of their early adventuring on Big Cedar Lake.⁹

Jack Dean was probably a member of his older brother Thomas' unit, 10th Royal Grenadiers, an infantry outfit. This Toronto militia group was called to active duty during the Boer War (1901-1903). Thomas Dean did not join brother Jack in South Africa, but he had served admirably during the North-West Rebellion in Manitoba in 1885. In fact, Thomas Dean was a member of the guard detail that was assigned to keep watch over Louis Riel. Riel was captured after the Métis resistance at Batoche. He was imprisoned in Regina, where he convicted of high treason. Despite pleas for clemency, he was executed in November of 1885.

⁸ Personal recollection of Don Austin, August 16, 2024.

⁹ For further information on the evolution of cottage properties on Big Cedar Lake, consult the Lavery's [Up the Burleigh Road](#), pages 69-71.

Mrs. William Davis, of Peter street, her son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. William J. Davis, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert B. Magill, of West Marion street, have been camping on Big Cedar Lake, Peterboro County. John Dean, of Toronto, his sister from Chicago, her two Chicago friends, and Miss Alice Lloyd, of Berlin, are still there. The islands bear the family names, Davis, Magill, and Dean.

The father of Thomas Dean and Jack Dean was Thomas Dean Sr, who migrated to Toronto from Derbyshire, England in the 1850s. The Deans were members of the Church of England. Thomas Dean Sr., along with Edward Scott, who became an influential and wealthy industrialist in Detroit, were the owners of the Dominion Brass Foundry at 119 Adelaide St. in Toronto. This firm was the precursor of the Dominion Wheel and Brass Foundry. This 20th Century iteration of Dean's Dominion Foundry had extensive works in the Distillery District of Toronto. The site was in the news in 2022 after it was bought by the city with plans to develop it.

Jack Dean and his brother Thomas were partners in Dean Brothers Brass Molding Co. of Toronto. Thomas lived in York Village at 92 Olive.

When he was 14, William Scott began his association with Thomas Dean, Sr. by becoming his apprentice. When he completed his apprenticeship at the foundry, he became first a molder, then a brass founder. Showing remarkable promise, he soon became a partner with his boss Thomas Dean.

Thomas Dean and William Scott lived at the perfect time for men of a mechanical bent. Steam-powered transport had been ascendant since the 1830s. Cities all over North America were putting in streetlights, fire hydrants, and sewers. Factories were using steam power instead of coal. Urban homes were starting to be lit by gas, heated by steam, and boasting indoor plumbing. Steam and water fittings made of brass were in great demand. Dean and Scott focused their efforts on such fittings and prospered.¹⁰

Jack Dean's brother Thomas Dean, Jr, was a long-time member of the Toronto Royal Grenadiers. In 1885 he was a private serving with Sir Frederick Middleton's retinue during the North-West Uprising. After the Battle of Batoche, Louis Riel was put under the guard of Thomas Dean, Jr. Thomas was a member of "The 13 Braves," a special squad serving under General Middleton known for their bravery and military skill. Thomas Dean eventually rose to Sergeant in Co. D of the Royal Grenadiers before his retirement after 1920. In World War II he was activated and stood guard at the Toronto reservoir.

Jack Dean died on a Tuesday in December of 1929. While standing in line in front of the teller's cage at the Province of Ontario Savings Department, he suffered a stroke and was rushed to St. Michaels Hospital. He died there a few hours later, 54 years of age.

Dean's widow, Mathilda Bramwell Stanford Dean, known as Hilda, purchased from Clarence Bell the point of land just west of Sybil Island on the northeast shore of Big Cedar Lake. This was purchased in 1955 by the Boston family, and the cottage remains with the

¹⁰ Kucera, Gail. "Steam-age inventors in Detroit's golden age."

OBITUARY

Thomas Dean

For thirty-eight years a member of the Royal Grenadiers, joining when a youth, Thomas Dean died at his home, 92 Olive avenue, yesterday in his 69th year, after being in failing health for the past eight years.

During the northwest rebellion Private Dean, as he was then known, was one of the famous "thirteen braves" who were noted for their splendid daring and achievements. He was the first guard over Riel after his capture. At the time of Riel's capture, Private Dean was attached to General Middleton's retinue.

The late Mr. Dean was a sergeant of "D" company of the Royal Grenadiers, but reverted to the ranks and during the past war, owing to his ineligibility to go overseas, did guard work at the civic reservoir.

Mr. Dean was born in Toronto, where he had lived all his life. He was one of the firm of Dean Brothers Brass Molding Company, having been a member for 40 years.

Surviving him are two daughters, Ethel May and Francis, and a son, Frank Dean, all of Toronto.



THOMAS DEAN

former member of the Royal Grenadiers and veteran of the Northwest Rebellion of 1885, whose funeral was held from his home 92 Olive avenue, to-day, interment being in St. John's cemetery.



Jack Dean namesake of Dean Island, Big Cedar Lake, Ontario

family.¹¹ Edith Ellen Dean, Jack's "spinster" sister, purchased Dean Island at an auction sponsored by her brother's estate in 1931.¹²

Hilda Stanford Dean's roots extend back to the lower East Side of New York City. Hilda's grandfather was Julius Frazer, a first-generation Irish American who lived all his life in Manhattan's 13th and 7th Wards. Like his father and brother, Julius was a ship caulker by trade. He was also a volunteer firefighter, first with Engine Company #33 "Black Joke" on Gouvernor Street in the 7th Ward, until it was disbanded in 1844. He is noted in public record as being involved in numerous scuffles with other engine and firehouses. At the time, insurance companies paid out most to the companies who arrived first to the scene. Fights between companies often ensued. Since they were volunteers, the firefighters received no pay. However, the monies were instead paid out to their fire houses that used the funds to buy more gear and to take fancy excursions to visit cities and other fire houses. In February 1842, Julius was banned from being a firefighter for 18 months for his part in a fight involving three engine companies.

In 1848 Hilda's grandfather became one of the founding members of Engine Company #6 - Americus 'Big Six' Tiger. A cofounder of this company was William "Boss" Tweed of Tammany Hall infamy one of America's most powerful and corrupt political leaders in the 19th century. Frazer's and Tweed's firehouse still stands today on Henry Street (Company 15),.

Hilda Dean's grandmother died in February 1861 of consumption and was buried in Green-Wood Cemetery. Julius was left to raise three small children alone, but was probably aided by his mother, the matriarch of the Frazer family. He sent Hilda's mother, Frances ("Fanny" or "Lizzie"), to Toronto after the Civil War. Here she lived with her Aunt Matilda Smith Palmer. and met her husband, William Stanford. She remained in Toronto for the rest of her life. Frances' brothers stayed with Julius in New York City. Julius died in November of 1872 at Bellevue Hospital from cirrhosis of the liver.¹³



¹¹ Lavery, p, 70.

¹² <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/searches/soldierDetail.asp?ID=87907>

¹³ "Julius Frazer." Bio from Find a Grave



Hilda Dean’s grandfather, Julius Frazer, was a cohort of the notorious Political boss, William Tweed of NYC. They were co-founders of the Americus Fire Association in 1848.

The Polings Come to big Cedar

In July of 1936, Dean Island officially became the property of Virgil Poling and his parents. The property had been previously transferred to Jack Dean’s sister, Edith Poling, who had been an army nursing officer stationed in England during World War I.¹⁴ The cost of the island was \$122.00, a bargain basement price since it was in the middle of the Great Depression. The deed stated that the Crown had the right to take possession of standing pines on the property at any time. Though it was a long, 10-hour commute from Virgil’s new home at 14 Sibley Place in Rochester, he would spend much of his free time on Dean Island during the next twelve years of his life.

An ancient refuse dump on the island, dating to the early 20th century, revealed that the Dean family camped on the island from the beginning and probably erected the icehouse on its relatively barren southern tip. Virgil decided the icehouse would be a good location for his cottage and made it the core of his new project. Today it is the kitchen of what is known as the Green Cottage.

At the time, according to Connie Wedow, there were only three other cottages on Big Cedar Lake. A survey of old maps and histories seems to indicate that Austin, Northcutt, and Holt were already on the lake by the time Virgil started his cabin. My father-in-law, Frank Williams, thought it might have been the seventh cottage built.

¹⁴ <https://canadiangreatwarproject.com/person.php?pid=87907#archivalInformationAnchor>

To help build his cabin, Virgil brought up energetic contingents of boys and girls from the Harley School in Rochester¹⁵ Each summer he'd bring up a new group of Harley students. It was a progressive school and Virgil's idea that a student's education was not complete until he or she had produced a useful object with their own hands fit in well with the school's mission. Virgil also conducted classes in wood lore and camping on his island. One of his techniques was to have his students choose their own provisions on their first wilderness canoe trip. Their choices were usually bulky and impractical. Their second trip out was much easier since the greenhorns had a newfound respect for their mentor's knowledge of camping and outdoor life.

Starting with the old icehouse as a nucleus, summer by summer, Poling and his young charges built the cottage. One of the cabin's many unique features included leaded glass windows salvaged from an old Rochester estate. The cottage also boasts two imposing fireplaces made from stones once scattered across the island. The doors were fashioned by hand and adorned with handles made from large, twisted juniper roots. A rambling, stone patio, with cedar balustrades, was also completed. A breezeway connected the main cottage with two dormitories and was supported by cedar posts. Very few materials were purchased new and much of the lumber was milled on the island. What wasn't salvaged from old structures around the area was taken from the island itself.

After spending three years in Connecticut, Virgil was inspired to put cedar shingles on the exterior walls of his new cottage. He would have seen this type of facade in New England. This is also the same type of cladding that is so popular in the Maritime Provinces of Canada. As far as I know, it was, and is, the only cottage on Big Cedar to have shingled outer walls. Instead of letting the cedar shingles of his walls weather, he painted them white and used blue on the trim.

Many of the crafts created by Virgil and his Harley students still survive at the Green Cottage: buckets and baskets made from the island's trees, a child's highchair made of twigs and branches, a quaint waste basket made of slats, a carved kindling holder for the fireplace and a colorful tray to name a few. From Maine, he brought an exquisite 1913 Old Town canoe that still cuts through the waters of Big Cedar like a dream.

Virgil also graced the western end of his cottage with a screened-in porch and a stone fireplace intended for BBQ. Jack May, a Big Cedar Lake historian, reported that he did this to provide himself with a comfortable and scenic place for an artist's studio. When I asked his widow about Virgil's painterly acumen, however, she responded that she had never known him to paint or watercolor. However, knowing Virgil's penchant for trying anything once, I think he really did have artistic aspirations during the period the cottage was built. In fact, as we read

¹⁵ The school was first called "The Children's University School of Rochester." Its stated purpose was "to interpret and meet the needs of the individual child so that he may fit in with and serve his fellow beings to the height of his power. In January 1924, the school was incorporated under the Education Law of the State of New York under the name HARLEY. Everyone was talking and thinking about 'Progressive Education' during those years, and the group of parents who started the school were very serious about combining the best of various methods in their children's education. September 1925, an event of major importance occurred for the school. Miss Louise Sumner became the director. She had taught previously at Evanston High School, and for 10 years she had been director of a girls' camp in the Adirondacks, a position she kept for many years after she became Harley's director. During the years of her tenure, 1925-1944, the school grew into the school we know today – a school for boys and girls for nursery school age to college entrance. Because she was a woman of vision, courage, and infinite dedication, she was able to appreciate and make real the principles laid down in 1917 by the original mothers. She also added many ideas of her own, Harleyites of today will recognize many of the policies we sponsor as having come from her. --- http://www.harleyschool.org/about/who-we-are/history/#.U_ZpSfldX8Y

earlier on his 1934 marriage license, he listed his occupation as artist. At the Harley School, he also taught sketching classes.

Steve Metro, the owner of N. H. Wilson Lumber and Supply in Apsley, once related that his father-in-law Norm Wilson used to paddle with Virgil up to Cox Lake so that he could sketch. Virgil was a long-time friend of the Regionalist painter Paul Sample and may well have been inspired by his colleague to try his hand with a brush or sketch pad.¹⁶

Norm was always struck by the women that came up to "Virgil's island." He said that every year he seemed to have a new one. Big Cedar Lake Cottager Dick Jones recalled that his mother always referred to Virgil's island as the "Girl's Camp." Since Virgil taught wood lore and had his Harley students help him built his cabin, the women Wilson and Mrs. Jones referred to would have been chaperones for the co-eds from the Harley School.

In January of 1941, not long after the completion of his Big Cedar Lake cottage, Virgil took a position on the faculty of the prestigious New England school, Dartmouth, in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Virgil happened to be in the audience in Rochester when E. Gordon Bill, the dean of faculty at Dartmouth, gave a speech to alumni describing Dartmouth's newly established artists in residence program. He mentioned that it would involve poet Robert Frost and painter Paul Sample among other luminaries. Bill ended his speech by saying, "And now what we need is a workshop man." Virgil, who had been thinking about making a change in his life, approached the Dean and said, "I have just the man."¹⁷

A few days later, Virgil received a letter from Dean Bill. He traveled to Dartmouth and within a few hours, he was hired to be part of the artist-in-residence program, receiving the title "director of the student workshop." The following article soon appeared in the "Lantern," the student newspaper of Ohio State, Virgil's alma mater.¹⁸

Grad to Head Student Workshop at Dartmouth

Virgil Poling, '30, for eight years director of the fine arts department of the Harley Country Day School at Rochester, N. Y. has been named by President Ernest M. Hopkins of Dartmouth to set up an experimental student workshop. In an effort to lesson emphasis upon the "white collar" aspects of higher education, President Hopkins' innovation will establish a liberal arts education which will include instruction in woodworking and other manual crafts.

¹⁶ Paul Sample attended Dartmouth from 1916-21 and earned his degree in architecture. Later he studied art at the Otis Art Institute. It was not until after Sample spent four years recovering from tuberculosis after his college graduation that he turned to art. When Sample regained his health, he went to study with Jonas Lie. In 1926 he decided to move to California where he taught at the University of Southern California. He also worked as a war art correspondent for Life Magazine from 1942-45. Sample's career was a success from the start, beginning by illustrating ads for big business such as General Motors and Maxwell House Coffee. He also illustrated articles for many leading magazines. He was a Realist landscape and genre painter whose work reflected a richness and joy in life. Sample really developed his own style while in California rather than depict popular subjects such as the Sierra Mountains or desert florals. He served as an artist-in-residence at Dartmouth College from 1938 until his retirement in 1962. Sample died at his home in Vermont in 1974. --- <http://www.caldwellgallery.com/bios/samplebio.html>

¹⁷ Brown. Op cit.

¹⁸ The Lantern, 19 February 1941. Ohio State University.



Virgil Poling with students in his workshop in the basement of Bissell Hall at Dartmouth College. Poling was the director of the Dartmouth Creative Arts Studio for 23 years and also the director of extracurricular activities at Dartmouth.

The college's President, Ernest Martin Hopkins, a strong Liberal Arts proponent and giant of American college education, shared Virgil's philosophy about students' needing to work with their hands.¹⁹ He handpicked Virgil to be the director of his student workshops in the

¹⁹ Ernest Martin Hopkins (1877-1964) served as the 11th President of Dartmouth College from 1916 to 1945. At the dedication of the Hopkins Center for the Arts in 1962, the speaker, then-Governor of New York Nelson A. Rockefeller, turned to the man for whom the building was named and said, "I came to Dartmouth because of you."

basement of the Bissell building, which was the old gymnasium. Thus, in 1941, Virgil officially became the director of the Dartmouth Creative Arts Studio, a position he held for 23 years. He was also director of extracurricular activities at Dartmouth. In that capacity he was active with the Dartmouth Outing Club, the Dartmouth Ski Club, the annual freshman hike and various other clubs and activities. One last hat he wore was to be, in 1943, the first training director of the School for American Crafts.²⁰

In the early days of Dartmouth, manual work by students was a required part of the college's curriculum. The students were even forbidden to "at any time speak diminutively of the practice of labor or by any means to cast contempt upon it...by words or action." In 1941, thanks to Virgil and President Hopkins this became a privilege. President Hopkins believed that a man's love and need to work with his hands was being thwarted by industrialization and he knew that Virgil Poling could address this issue for Dartmouth's students.

One of Dartmouth's deans warned Virgil that he might well have only ten boys show up. Actually, during that first year, six hundred students took part in Virgil's voluntary program. The second year saw 1200 undergraduates participate. Virgil became famous on campus for two qualities; one was his outstanding and mystifying ability to always be available to his students when they needed help and the second was his ability to teach without seeming to teach. Virgil was known for the tremendous amount of work he accomplished each day, yet he always seemed unrushed and free of tension. Popular projects at the student workshop included canoes, boats, radios, record players, coffee tables, furniture for dorm rooms, and jewelry for girlfriends. During the war, knives also came into vogue. One student even restored a full-sized church organ.

One of Virgil's early priorities for the Student Workshop was the establishment of a collection that would show the development of tools and their relationship to the design of architecture and furniture in New England. In 1944 this desire received a significant jump-start when the workshop received an extensive collection of furniture and cabinet making tools belonging to the late Dartmouth mathematics professor Charles Haskins.

As a young man growing up in New Hampshire, he worked in a granite quarry and decided to attend Dartmouth for his undergraduate education over the stern objections of his father. So strong were the impressions he made in Hanover during his student years that then-President William Jewett Tucker employed him as a clerk and supported him with a scholarship during the depression of the 1890s.

Ernest Martin Hopkins didn't fit the typical mold of a college president. He was not an academic, had never held a teaching position and had spent the bulk of his career in the business world. The administration of Ernest Martin Hopkins spanned two world wars, and he was called to serve his country on several occasions. In World War I, he was named Assistant Secretary of War for Industrial Relations and served in the Office of Production and Management at the outset of World War II. President Hopkins declined an invitation to serve as president of the University of Chicago in order "to continue development of his ideas of what an undergraduate liberal arts education should encompass." The articulation of these ideas during the Hopkins administration has become an enduring legacy that continues at Dartmouth today. -----Wikipedia

²⁰ The concept of having a School for American Crafts was created in by Aileen Osborn Webb, a wealthy and philanthropic New Yorker, during a post-World War II revival of handcrafts. The school developed as a result of the mission of the American Craftsmen's Education Council, whose goal was education and finding ways to market and sell handmade goods. The Council saw craftspeople as leaders of a new movement that would reinvigorate standards of design and workmanship reviving American craft traditions and contributing their expertise to methods of mass production. The school left Dartmouth for Alfred University after the war and in 1950 found a permanent home at Rochester Institute of Technology ---https://www.rit.edu/news/athenaeum_story.php?id=50548

When Virgil visited the Haskin workshop for the first time, he was delighted by the organization and scope of the collection and the meticulous care each tool, no matter how ancient, had received. The many tools of the collection had been assembled by Haskin himself and his father and grandfather. Both were professional builders and cabinet makers and lovers of old hand tools. Some of the tools they had amassed were early English and German tools.

From a practical point of view, Virgil was also delighted by Professor Haskin's many modern power tools. The Dartmouth Student Workshop was still in its early years and needed all the tools, old or new, that it could get. Echoing his long-held philosophy, Virgil said at the time"

*Good tools sometimes help in the shaping of good objects; they also, sometimes, help in the shaping of good minds. I sincerely hope that many Dartmouth students will profit by handling and using these tools.*²¹

The war years and his duties as director made it more difficult for Virgil to enjoy his Ontario cottage. The roads from Hanover to Ontario were slow going and, besides, gasoline was strictly rationed during World War II. He was also playing an important role in the war effort, although he was not wearing a uniform.²² Virgil helped train navy and marine personnel, who were enrolled in the V-12 program, and assigned to Dartmouth.

Dartmouth became a de facto naval base for the remainder of the war. Beginning in 1943, there were 2,100 men training at Dartmouth to become ensigns and lieutenants. The program was a liberal arts course, but with military discipline, and special military subjects as well. The College accelerated its curricula and shifted to, year-round operation. Dartmouth's fraternities closed, Winter Carnival was cancelled, the *Daily Dartmouth* stopped publication and rationing went into effect. Civilian students were outnumbered three to one by military personnel. The campus was run on military time, with reveille and taps played. ²³



Virgil Poling with V-12 Navy college student-recruits in 1943.

²¹ Poling, Virgil. "Old Tools Given." Dartmouth Alumni Magazine. March 1944, page 6.

²² Cireleville Harold, August 14, 1943, page 2.

²³ https://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/rauner/archives/oral_history/worldwar2/history.html

After the war, Virgil proceeded from training navy men to helping disabled veterans:

School for Craftsmen

Up at Dartmouth College, nestled in the Hills of Hanover, VT, there's a new educational training project under way, a "School for Craftsmen" and an Ohio State man is the director. He is Professor Virgil Poling, BA '30, who has steadily acquired a mounting reputation as one of the nation's leading crafts teachers. He has been at Dartmouth four years and for eight years before that he was director of the department of fine arts at the Harley Country Day School in Rochester, NY.

The school at Dartmouth is sponsored by the American Craftsmen's Educational Council which for some times has been working toward a nation-wide revitalization of the manual arts and a clearer definition of their relation to modern industry so as to restore them as a full means of making a living.

For the present and immediate future, the school in admitting students will give preference to disabled war veterans, who by learning hand crafts will acquire the means for making their own independent living and for becoming happier members of their home communities. The new school has the endorsement of federal and state rehabilitation officers. The training program which Professor Poling has outlined for the craft students will cover a period of two years.²⁴

In 1944, a few years after his father's death, Virgil's mother and his stepfather signed over their share of the island to him (His parents had divorced after the purchase of Dean Island). After the war, to complicate matters, his daughters were highly susceptible to car sickness, and his wife was not a big fan of the outdoors. In 1949, with growing pressure from his family, Virgil reluctantly decided to sell the cottage he had built with his own hands. Furthermore, by this time, he was turning his attention to the possibilities of cottaging in Maine.

The Williams Family Acquires the Green Cottage

This is where Frank Williams enters the story of Dean Island. After World War II, Milton "Robbie" Robinson, encouraged them to stay at his island cottage on Big Cedar Lake. Robbie was the art and scenic director for the Rochester Community Players, one of the oldest community theater groups in the United States. Frank and Peg were both active volunteers in the organization. Peg handled make-up and Frank was the electrician, lighting specialist and played in the theater orchestra. Today Robbie's Island belongs to David Wright and is known as Christian Island. Frank took his friend up on the offer and the family had a delightful, rustic experience. The William made subsequent trips up to Big Cedar where they socialized with the Polings, a Rochester couple, who were on an adjacent island. Virgil Polson had also been a member of the same community theatre group and designed and built scenery for the plays at the

²⁴ "Alumni In Spotlight" *The Ohio State University Monthly*. December 1945, p. 27

Harley School in Rochester. When Virgil decided to sell, he phoned Frank and offered to sell Dean Island and its picturesque, little green cottage for \$1,500. By coincidence, Peg had just inherited that exact amount from her mother's estate.



Milton “Robbie” Robinson, former owner of Robinson’s Island (Sill or Christian Island) on Big Cedar Lake, at work at the Rochester Community Players where he had a full-time job as set designer and artistic director.

To Frank, it was a dream come true. He came from a Midwestern family with a long history of “cottaging” and he very much liked the idea of having a retreat in the Ontario wilds. He suggested to Peg that they now possessed enough money to buy either “that nice cottage just across the way from Robbie’s place in Canada” or a new car ...which should it be?

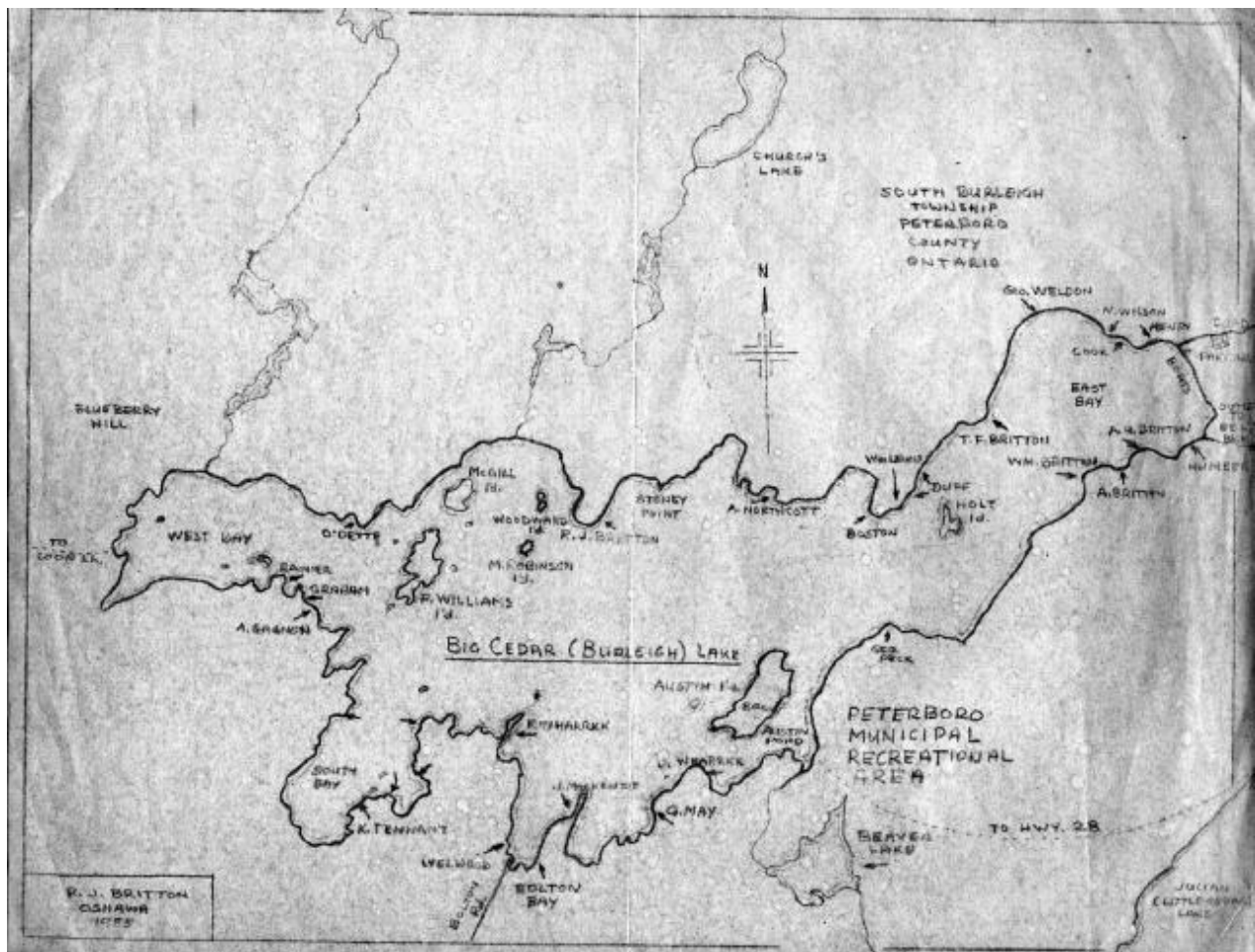
To this she replied, “...a new car.”

Not to be deterred, Frank called a family meeting, and he patiently explained to the family, “We’ve never had a new car, but we can surely buy one in the future. A cottage opportunity like this comes along only once.”

Frank’s youngest daughter Alison, who would one day take over the cottage, voted in favor of the cottage and even Peg relented in the face of Frank’s passion and logic. And so, Virgil’s island was purchased in 1949. It went for a bargain basement price for 3.6 acres of Canadian Shield and marsh with a veneer of pines, oaks, maples, swale and juniper and a great view of sunsets and sunrises. It came equipped with a library, tools, furniture, boats, canoes, linens, china and pots and pans. Naturally, there was a privy but no electricity or running water. The green cottage was just about a decade old when it came under the stewardship of the Williams family. Still, by the time Frank and his family acquired the island, there was plenty of work ahead.

The island was a perfect foil for Frank's love of problem solving and his well-developed work ethic. Frank's family would spend summers on the island, so water systems had to be devised, and a proper outhouse needed to be constructed and a boathouse too. Cabinets and counters had to be built, docks fashioned, undergrowth cleared, boats maintained. Frank, a physicist and mathematician at Kodak in Rochester, always found ingenious ways to solve the multitude of challenges posed by a cottaging in the wilderness.

By the 1970's, Frank's extended family had grown considerably, and Peg's health began to decline. Therefore, it was decided that a new cottage would be constructed in a peaceful glade facing a beautiful little cove on the northeast side of the island. In 1976 the frame and roof were built on a sturdy foundation. Later, a backhoe and septic tank were barged over to the island so that a proper sanitation system could be in place. Frank and his family did the rest of the work. In clearing the site, Frank's engineering skills were put to the test. One ingenious apparatus he developed was a device made of logs, pulleys, and rope, which he used to move large boulders. He later used similar concepts to heave 100-pound propane tanks into place at both cottages. To heat his water and operate the cottage's water pump, Frank installed solar panels on his roof. A special ramp was built for Peg's wheelchair.



Map of Big Cedar Lake with cottage owners drawn by R. J. Britton in 1955

For the most part, the green cottage looks the same on the outside as when Virgil and his students built it. We replaced all the windows and enclosed the front porch to make a dining room in response to the growth of our family. Many years ago, Alison's mom changed the exterior paint scheme from the original white with blue trim to green (her favorite color) with white trim and we are careful to preserve the exterior shakes and sand and paint various sections of them each summer. Virgil's cut leaded glass windows are our pride and joy. When I moved them during a leveling project, I was delighted to see Vigil's name etched into the lower corner of one pane. The interior walls are now lined with cedar v-groove and bookshelves. The old heart pine floors have been brought back to life. Hydro was installed in 1992. The old cedar posts and balustrades on the breezeway were about to crumble into dust, so we replaced them and screened the original breezeway. The old outhouse, with an Incinolet toilet, is still in operation! Virgil's old books and pamphlets (many about fishing with a good sampling of woodcraft and field guides) are still in the island library.

The lake itself has changed quite a bit since Virgil Poling's sold his place to us. Instead of the 12 cottages when he was last on the lake, there are now over 120. The fishing's not as good, but it's improving lately with better environmental management and the introduction of Muskellunge and Walleye. Both help control the pesky "red-eye" Rock Bass. The weekends get a bit hectic with boat traffic, water skiing, tubing, and jet skis, but during the week, things are quiet. The sunsets are still spectacular and the sun rising over Robbie's Island is also a beautiful sight, especially on the mornings when the water is warmer than the air, creating mist that makes the scene quite ethereal.

Frank Williams asked his friend Ron Squires, a Big Cedar Lake canoe builder, to rehabilitate the Old Town cedar strip canoe Virgil left with the island. The wildlife is still abundant but unfortunately, the blueberries are in decline. Many of the families Virgil knew still have descendants well represented on the lake.

Virgin Poling After Big Cedar

As for Virgil, after he sold his beloved "little cabin" on Big Cedar, he went on to have a distinguished career at Dartmouth. He was a popular instructor and was awarded an honorary Master of Arts Degree from Dartmouth in 1948. While at Hanover, he became a colleague and good friend of Robert Frost, one of most celebrated American poets of the 20th century. According to Virgil's widow, Frost presented a walking stick to Virgil as a token of his friendship and to commemorate all the fine walks they took together. Of their friendship, Poling later recalled:

I was very fond of Frost. He was—first of all, he was a great ham, a wonderful one. He had a great sense of humor, which, in his dry manner, wouldn't come out unless you understood it. But a lot of people were sort of afraid to approach him for a lot of things. I remember once, a friend in a publishing house in Boston—I forget which one—wanted to make—they were starting to make records of readings of poetry and this sort of thing, and he phoned me to ask me if I knew anyone who could read Robert Frost poems. And I said, "Of course. Robert Frost." He said, "Do you think he'd do it?" I said, "He'd love it," and he did. He loved it. I remember once, in his 80s, Frost was to give a reading of his poems, which he did every year, to community, the college and community. He got up after a proper introduction, and he had his—lay his book out in front of him,

*and he got these glasses out, and made a great show of it. He said, "You know, I've never used these things before. I've come to the point I have to." And then he read about two or three lines. He said, "Oh, they're no good." He took them off and read the rest of the whole evening without. Of course, he knew the poems. He didn't have to have the glasses. It was just a show. It was one of the nice things about him.*²⁵

Frost and Poling were part of a group of instructors to whom students came, not because they were required to, but because they wanted to. They received no academic credit or grades but with the help of Poling and his friends and colleagues, Dartmouth undergraduates had the chance to learn avocational interests that enriched their lives long after they had departed the Hanover Campus. Frost called this group of teachers the "Loose Enders." He said the purpose of this group was to remind students "that something must be done with all these acres of land, these books, not repetition, or marks, or another person's work."

Besides Frost and Poling, this unique group included the legendary Ross McKenney, former trapper, guide, lumber jack and founder of the Dartmouth Outing Club; Ray Nash, a noted printer and calligrapher; Paul Sample, a well-known painter and the Dartmouth Artist in Residence; and Douglas Wade, the college naturalist who was a protégé of Aldo Leopold, the author of the sublime Sand Country Almanac.²⁶ They were an informal but close-knit group and definitely enjoyed each other's company. In the fall and spring when Frost was on campus, Virgil and he enjoyed long rambles in the surrounding woods and fields. Virgil made sure that Ross McKenney and his students had free run of his workshop and provided a grinder for him to keep his axes and knives sharp for duty in the woods.

Next to Frost, Virgil was probably closest to Paul Sample, the first "loose ender" to come to Dartmouth. Of his friendship with Sample, Virgil said in 1980:

Paul was wonderful—not only a wonderful artist, but a wonderful person. Very kind and interested in a lot of things. Very talented. He was also a fine musician. Played the flute and was a great outdoorsman. He had horses and rode a lot. He was a great fisherman and spent a great deal of his time in out-of-door life. You know, he had been ill, and was supposed to spend a lot of time outdoors.

*I designed and built a barn for him, for his horses. And then they had a place up on Lake Willoughby, where they had five or six houses, and I think I did over all those houses for him, and for the whole studio—his summer studio was there. I did over at least three of the houses, where the family—a lot of the family lived in them. So, I worked very closely with him. And I used to make all these frames, and it was a lot of frames.*²⁷

²⁵Brown. Op. cit.

²⁶ In a 1990 poll of the membership by the American Nature Study Society, *A Sand County Almanac* and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* stand alone as the two most venerated and significant environmental books of the 20th century. The book has had immense popular influence and has been described as: "one of the benchmark titles of the ecological movement", "a major influence on American attitudes toward our natural environment", "recognized as a classic piece of outdoor literature, rivaling Thoreau's *Walden Pond*." ---Wikipedia

²⁷ Brown. Op cit.

In 1963 the building that housed Virgil's shop was torn down to be replaced by the new Hopkins Center. Virgil had been working very hard for over twenty years and the powers that be felt he deserved sabbatical. Virgil thought two years off would suffice since it would be about that long before his new shops would be ready. He had just about decided to go to Santa Barbara as a visiting professor, when the telephone rang one day and someone in Washington said, "Say, would you consider going to Morocco for a year?"

Virgil replied, "Sure, but I need to know more about it." The result was that he did decide to go to Morocco as a small industry advisor – crafts. He was to work for what was then known as International Development Agency and today is known as United States Agency for International Development [AID].

Virgil had always wanted to travel and now he had the opportunity. And of course, he was interested in the work. His main emphasis in Morocco was modernizing traditional methods. For instance, his team did a great deal of work in tanning. Morocco had been famous for leather for centuries. However, the leather was deteriorating, to the point that it was inferior. It stank and didn't hold up. The Moroccans were in danger of losing their market. Virgil's team provided new chemicals and new methods for tanning. After a few years they were again making among the best leather products in the world.

One valuable lesson Virgil learned was that one can't go in and just instantly change age-old methods. The native craftsmen wouldn't accept it. So, he added the virtue of finesse to his many abilities.

They were still tramping the hides in pits. They didn't know anything about tumblers and paddle wheels, and we had to make these. They had to be turned by hand. The smell was largely because they didn't have enough water to wash it and clean it, and some of their tanning materials were wonderful, but by putting a little detergent with the water, you could get rid of the smell, and by adding a few chemicals to their native materials.²⁸

He was in Morocco about two and a half years. In 1963 he resigned and returned to Dartmouth to set up his shops in the Hopkins Center. His work abroad led to the dissolution of his marriage to wife Esther, who finally refused to travel with him

Virgil's work for U. S. Aid was primarily as an industrial and craft advisor for countries all over the world. His assignments were chiefly in Asia and Africa, but he also worked in Europe. His most important assignments were in Bangladesh, Nigeria, Congo, Morocco, Kenya, South Korea and Laos. During his career with the State Department, his areas of expertise included woodworking, auto mechanics and motor reconditioning, metal working, textiles, research and development of new enterprises, design, marketing and marketing research, business management and even shoemaking.

The philosophy he applied to his duties as an U. S. Aid administrator can be reviewed simply by rereading his 1941 quote that opens this biography. He took his job of helping third world countries very seriously and without cynicism. For instance, towards the end of his career, he was furious at the corruption he encountered during his South Korean Angora-silk project and what he viewed as the State Department's tacit support of it. Assessing his work in South Korea, his boss described him as "a self-starter, able to plan out his own work, develop his own contacts, get going on a job and finish it in a commendable manner."

²⁸ Ibid.

During this phase of life, he worked closely with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis on a project to acquaint the world with Korean silks. He was chummy enough with Jackie O, a very private person, that in one of his letters to her, he asked her opinion on the miniskirts that were appearing in her Fifth Avenue neighborhood.

Virgil also had a close collaboration with Leslie and D. D. Tilletts, who were noted textile artists and who had helped their patron, Mrs. Onassis, redecorate the White House when she was First Lady. The Tilletts had been active in promoting the growth of textile businesses overseas and were recruited by Virgil and the Agency for International Development in the late 1960s. The Tilletts taught printing and design techniques to South Korean producers of raw silk and helped bring their new products to the United States. They also worked in Mexico, China, Lesotho and Peru.²⁹

Esther Poling was not enthralled by service abroad and this led to friction in their marriage. They divorced in 1964. Virgil had met his second wife Edith while in Morocco, He proposed to her in Peru, married her in Nigeria, and they honeymooned in the Netherlands and Spain. She spoke five languages fluently and was functional in three more, handy skills for the wife of a Foreign Service officer. One of their assignments was in Greece for the United Nations. Edith, of course spoke Greek.

While Virgil and Edith were in Greece, they lived in the Plaka, the old city of Athens. From the rear balcony of their apartment, they could see the Parthenon, hugging the cliff side of the Acropolis. His office was in the newer part of the city, about a mile from his apartment, The walk from his home to work provided an opportunity for a pleasant stroll through the public park, once the Queen's garden. Virgil's favorite spot there was near the park's entrance, in an isolated cluster of olive trees. Here were two chairs carved from marble. They were situated at the base of a small hill, with a flat, grassy area in front of them. According to tradition, this was where Socrates held many of his dialogues. One of the two chairs marked where Socrates sat. Years later Virgil remarked:

I was intrigued with the idea of being present at the spot where Socrates had taught, and I felt his presence as I lingered there and imagined that I was taking part in one of the old teacher's dialogues. In the grass area in front of the marble chairs was a very old olive tree, now little more than a decaying stump, which tradition held had once shaded Socrates and his students. It occurred to me that 2,300 years is a very long time for a tree, even an olive tree, to live, but the idea was so fascinating that I never tried to determine the truth of the story.

Once, when I thought no one was looking, I sat on the grass in front of the chairs and was content to sit at the feet of the old philosopher, and words formed in my mind as if they were coming from the lips of Socrates: "I shall seek always to know the truth and to live in accord with it, and I urge all others - to the utmost extent of my power - to join me in this effort."³⁰

²⁹Personal Papers of Virgil Poling.

³⁰ Poling Virgil. "At the feet of Socrates." Christian Science Monitor. August 31, 1988.

In 1971, at age 63, Virgil retired from AID. When the Polings decided to trade life in the Foreign Service for retirement, they seriously considered living in Greece or Japan. However, Virgil was quite fond of Maine and owned land there. He wanted to see how Edith would take to it before they decided on a permanent home.³¹

Edith had never been to Maine and so he prepared her for its special characteristics. He also elaborated about the nature of “State of Mainers.”

I told her they were reserved, that they did not waste any words when talking, and that it was sometimes difficult to carry on a conversation with them. I also told her that they are honest, sincere, hardworking, ingenious, and very independent. She accepted and admired the latter part of the characterization but refused to accept the difficulty-of-conversation part.³²

In Stonington, they rented a starter place so they could “test the waters.” After unpacking on their first day, Edith experienced her first chat with a State of Mainer while on a lobster-buying expedition. Virgil later described this rather short but sweet exchange:

*As soon as we arrived at the lobster pier, a large boat with two men aboard pulled up to the pier for refueling. When they were tied up, my wife ran over and asked them, “Did you catch lots of lobsters today?”
“Nope,” was their response.
“What was wrong? Weren't they biting?” she asked.
“Didn't go out,” came the reply.³³*

Edith took to the place and did eventually learn to converse as a Down Easter, in fact Virgil said it became her “ninth language.” They purchased a small place in Stonington near a pier on the harbor. It was so close to the sea that at high tide the water reached under a part of the house. A friend who was visiting from New York, arrived at their doorstep at high tide and asked them if they were moored to land or were floating.³⁴

Stonington Harbor is still a very active harbor. Boats come and go with great frequency. Lobstermen and fishermen still start their day before dawn. Edith was always fascinated with the activity in the harbor. The sound of the first boat motor starting was her signal to arrive on the scene, and she loved to enjoy her coffee on the pier every morning during the summer.³⁵

Eventually, the Polings made their home on Virgil’s 200-acre farm on Little Dear Isle, on the coast of Maine. This farm was graced by the oldest farmstead on the island and Virgil built a cabin on the property. It’s on the shore of Eggemoggin Reach, the channel that separates Little Dear from the mainland. Virgil said it reminded him of “his little place on Big Cedar Lake in Ontario.” In 1976 Virgil, with Edith’s blessing, established a trust, so that the property could one day benefit his grandchildren. In 1985 Edith died at the age of 67.

³¹ Poling, Virgil. “Give Maine a Try.” Christian Science Monitor. August 24, 1987.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

On June 6, 1986, Virgil married Hye Ja Kim in a ceremony on Little Deer Island. The Polings enjoyed the unhurried and simple rhythms of life on the island and Virgil remained active. One of his passions was the founding and operation of the Maine Craft Association, whose goal was to spread the word about the unique crafts and skilled craftsmen who were operating in Maine, and nurture same. Virgil continued to embrace nature and was an avid gardener.

Virgil and Hye Ja's venerable old farmhouse was heated by wood, and he split and stacked his own firewood with care until the last year of his long life. Almost to the end, he enjoyed a healthy and active life and retained his inquisitive nature. He confidently believed that he would live to at least a hundred. When my wife Alison and I visited Hye Ja in 2006, she took pains to show me the last ricks he had assembled in the lean-to attached to their farmhouse. The firewood chunks were uniform and well-shaped and were stacked in the most elegant and meticulous manner I have ever witnessed...almost geometric perfection. Those cords were indeed things of beauty. Hye Ja could not bear to use the firewood and, five years after Vigil's death, the wood remained just as he had arranged it during the last months of his life.

On a blustery November day in 2001, Virgil, as was his routine, walked down his lane to Eggemoggin Road to retrieve the morning mail. An invisible patch of black ice caused him to take a bad fall. His injuries, though they seemed minor at first, soon led to his death at age 93.

Afterward

Right up to the end of his 54-year tenure on the island, Frank loved the challenges posed by island life. His last project was a new bridge spanning the cove to the "Game Preserve." He planned it to the nth detail and built the supporting pillars of rock and mortar himself (from a boat yet). No longer able to do the "heavy work" he supervised each step of the bridge's final construction by neighboring cottager and friend of the family - Richard Jones.

Frank cherished the beauty and solitude of Big Cedar Lake. After Peg died, he spent increasingly longer periods there. He especially enjoyed staying on the island in fall after the Lake's cottagers had gone home for another season. It's a peaceful time, often graced with some of the sunniest weather of the year to compliment the spectacular colors of autumn foliage. I have a mental picture of him sitting on the porch of his sun-dappled cottage. It's a fine early October day. He's watching the passing parade of wildlife, smiling with his eyes the way he did. Perhaps it's a pair of loons passing by or the lake otters playfully cavorting out front. If Frank's lucky, an osprey plunges into the cove after a bass. His view might be of a great blue heron alighting on the point. Maybe it's the beaver swimming silently on its daily run into the island's marsh. In my heart I know that he is there still, his noble and gentle spirit a part of the island, just as the island was part of him. ---Fred Schultz



The Williams Family in front of the Green Cottage in 1956. Left to right: Marshall, Faith, Peg, Frank and Alison



The old Green Cottage Kitchen with wood-burning stove. Circa 1972.



East side of the Green Cottage on Dean's Island in 1948. Future owner Alison Schultz, age five, is sitting on a rock by the shore. The spot where she sits is submerged most years. All the trees, but one, are gone now. Many fell in the windstorm of 1987. Note the cedar balustrades on the breezeway.

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