

BOB SCHALLIP'S SUMMER VACATION MEMORIES NEAR LOOKOUT #4

(Written by Lori Miller, 1/15/26)

Bob Schallip's family has been visiting the Barbeau area for over 90 years, creating treasured memories. For him, Lookout #4 holds a special place. He recently recalled his childhood experiences including his love for the St. Marys River, boating, fishing, and interactions with the Coast Guard.



Bob Schallip 1967

As a youngster, Bob knew it as the “Coast Guard House.” He recalls a sign on the top of the Lookout, which is confirmed by old pictures. As a teenager, Bob and his friends knew the Coast Guard enforced regulations on the water, so they always made sure they had their lifejackets on when boating.

Part of his summer vacation memories include teens getting ice cream, walking around, talking to people. This included members of the Coast Guard stationed at the Lookout. With only a five- or six-year age difference, Bob became friends with some of the crew. The Coast Guard members invited him in, where he stood watch with them. This was in the 1960's.

There were older radios and a table/makeshift desk with manuals and logbooks to record every boat that went by the Lookout. Bob describes one radio as a “big old radio”, high frequency, that could probably reach many miles and was accompanied by loud static when in use, so it was turned down when not in use. When a freighter went by, the crew would document the time, the draught (aka “draft”) or the number of feet of water showing. Those stats were then reported to the Coast Guard base in Sault Ste. Marie. Bob recalls a “big board with a pointer” which moved up and down the board. It was connected to pulleys and pipes under the water. This would indicate the feet and inches of water level above sea level. The “low water datum” was an important number because you could tell if a freighter was overloaded. Later, optical sensors that shine a light down a tube replaced the antiquated system.

The Rock Cut is 27 feet in depth and will not change because of the stone walls and bottom. There is a maximum load a ship can take before running aground. On ships, there is a diamond shape with a line on the side of the freighter which also shows the water level.

Later, a “single wire telephone system” was used on Neebish Island with a wire going all the way around the island. Lookout #1 had a “Coast Guard telephone” as did some private residences for islanders to use for emergency use only. Since there was no GPS back then, many shipping companies wanted to know where their boats were. However, it was expensive to install telephone systems. U.S. Steel paid for that telephone system and allowed the Coast Guard to use it as long as they did not allow any other shipping company to use it.

Coast Guard crews rented homes in the area. It is rumored that their reputation often preceded them sometimes making it difficult to find repeat rentals. One of the houses that they rented was the “stone house” on Scenic Drive. Bob enjoyed his first ever tuna fish sandwich with the Coast Guard. He recalls them putting lots of pepper on it, which is how he still prefers it. There was a combination refrigerator, one burner

stovetop and sink appliance. The crews always kept food on watch. A gas generator was on the floor for use during power outages causing the lights and radio to not work.

Bob remembers a 40-foot “picket boat” at the dock. The dictionary defines this type of boat as a “vessel used to patrol a harbor.” The picket boat was also used for search and rescue and had a specially designed hull which caused huge waves. When kids would see the boat in the river, they would quickly get their bathing suits to go swimming in the large waves.

Years ago, Bob had an underwater camera which he placed in the water near the Lookout. Old pots and pans were found which appeared to be burnt and simply discarded in the river.

After growing up and returning to the area for vacations, but before moving to Neebish Island, Bob had met a man in Cincinnati, Ohio. He told the man that he was going on vacation. The man asked him where. Bob told him that he probably never heard of the area, but he told him. Much to Bob’s surprise, the man replied “Oh, I was stationed there (Lookout #4) in World War II.” His name was Joe Rung.

Some of the Coast Guard men that Bob knew were switched to Lookout #1 located on Neebish Island. They brought Bob to Neebish Island which was his first time. He stood watch with them on Lookout #1. He remembers going down the rustic, dirt roads in the woods. Although he wasn’t a big city boy, he had never experienced being in the woods before.

Again, before GPS, there was also a navigation system in the river between cell #32 (red) and cell #33 (green). This system, used for warning the ships for fog or a sharp turn, had a very distinct, alternating bell and horn sound. Bob’s father once told him a story about a woman who owned property by the Ferry dock finally “taking exception” to the noise. It is rumored that she used a deer rifle and shot three times, finally hitting the siren. This story may have been recently confirmed by another story about life at Lookout #4.

One Coast Guard member had a 450 Honda motorcycle, which wouldn’t start. Another Coast Guard member decided to pull it with their 1959 station wagon in an effort to get it to start. Bob was in the car with the driver. When they made this attempt, the rope tightened up and the motorcycle flipped on top of the driver. The young men were afraid of possible internal injuries, so they went to the airbase in Kincheloe, which had a medical clinic. Bob went with them but was not allowed inside since he was a civilian. For years, there was a sign on Scenic Drive, “Hurve’s Curve.”

With all the positive influence from the Lookout crews, you might find it surprising that Bob did not join the Coast Guard. However, he did go onto college to study education and learn about engines, teaching in a large vocational school. He and his wife also became ferry Captains and ran the Neebish Islander II Ferry for 14 years, where they had the best view of Lookout #4 during thousands of daily crossings on the ferry.

It’s fascinating how a single childhood experience can lead to a journey of related experiences, bringing Bob full circle back to where it all began... the St. Mary’s River and Lookout #4.