

Charlie's Lighthouse

Anyone who has visited Lake Anasagunticook is almost certain to have noticed the faux lighthouse that sits on its own island just off the southeast shore of the lake. The lighthouse is such a part of local history that the Canton Town Office uses a picture of it on the town letterhead, and the Canton Bicentennial Committee has incorporated it into its logo. It's obvious that a small lake like ours doesn't need a lighthouse for safety purposes, so why's it there? In the summer of 1968, *Yankee Magazine* interviewed Canton local Charlie Ray to find out.

According to the August 1968 issue of the magazine, Charlie and his family moved to Canton in 1902—that's when Charlie's father, Arthur, got the job of running the tannery. Charlie loved the lake. As a teenager, he and his friends spent much of their time in and on the lake. At one point, they decided to pile some rocks in a shallow spot to make a swimming pool. It seemed to Charlie that the next natural step was to build an island!

Charlie, who by then worked at the local tannery, constructed the island in the evenings. A local farmer sold him the rocks from his stone walls, which Charlie moved to the island location. The work often occurred in the winters when the lake was frozen. Charlie would position the rocks so that when melting occurred in the spring, the rocks would land where he wanted them. According to *Yankee Magazine*, some of the townspeople were skeptical about the island—and wondered about Charlie's mental state—but he was not deterred. His work continued in the summers when he moved rocks out to the island via a homemade barge, and in the summer of 1936, the island was complete.

The island is a circle, 55 feet in diameter. Charlie named it "Rocky Mecca" after the Native American Rokomeko tribe that used to inhabit the area, as well as for Mecca, the famous place of religious pilgrimage. Charlie worked with the town selectmen to get a deed for the island. Then, with help from his family and local carpenters and masons, he began building a cabin and lighthouse! The height of the lighthouse would be over 18-feet and would include a windmill to provide electricity to the cabin. The structures were completed in 1937.

The lighthouse camp was truly a labor of love for Charlie Ray. For many years, he and his wife Hazel, their children, and their grandchildren enjoyed summers at the island camp. In the winter, the camp served as a warming station for locals who enjoyed ice boating. The Ray family sold the property in 1997, but its current owner continues to use the island as a camp today.

Sources: <https://www.oldhousedreams.com/2019/07/02/1937-canton-me/>; *Yankee Magazine*, August 1968, pages 76-77, 100-101; and information from CHS Board Member Mac Ray (who is one of Charlie Ray's grandsons).

Article courtesy of the Canton Historical Society.