

# Barrington to the Boundary Waters

PIONEERS OF BARRINGTON TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

ON MARCH 10, 1905, a superlative account appeared in the *Barrington Review* concerning an event held the previous Thursday at the “spacious” home of Mr. and Mrs. John Robertson—now Barrington’s White House. The account was written by Mrs. Mae Lane Spinner about the 11th Annual Banquet of the Women’s Thursday Club of Barrington, an organization of community leaders dedicated to improving the civic, cultural, and social environment of Barrington residents.

George and Mae Lane Spinner (she was christened Lillie) were leaders in Barrington; George a lawyer and village president from 1907 to 1909, and his wife Mae Lane, an elocution teacher. Land they owned on North Hough Street (north of the present Volvo Dealership) was known as Spinner’s Park, a site of community festivals, carnivals, and sports events.

However, the 1920s Depression years altered the Spinners’ financial circumstances, and through mutual friends who owned a resort in Wisconsin, they learned of a small wilderness camp for sale known as Gunflint Lodge in the Boundary Waters region of Northern Minnesota. Mae purchased this primitive site, and for the next few years with her only surviving child, Justine, worked to make Gunflint Lodge into a desirable location for those seeking outdoor vacation pursuits.

Justine was 21 when her mother purchased the lodge. In 1928, Justine graduated from Northwestern University with a major in zoology and minors in chemistry and philosophy. She wanted to be a doctor. But she agreed to help her mother at the lodge during her summer vacations. In 1929, Justine and Mae opened Gunflint Lodge under their management. Their enterprise and courage in an environment without indoor plumbing and any reliable services is a saga of the North Woods.

In 1933, Bill Neeland Kerfoot, son of the president of Hamline University, arrived at the lodge eager to do any work. In 1934, he and Justine married, and when Justine’s parents moved to Florida, she and Bill, and later, three of their children, were to turn Gunflint Lodge into a premier wilderness resort.

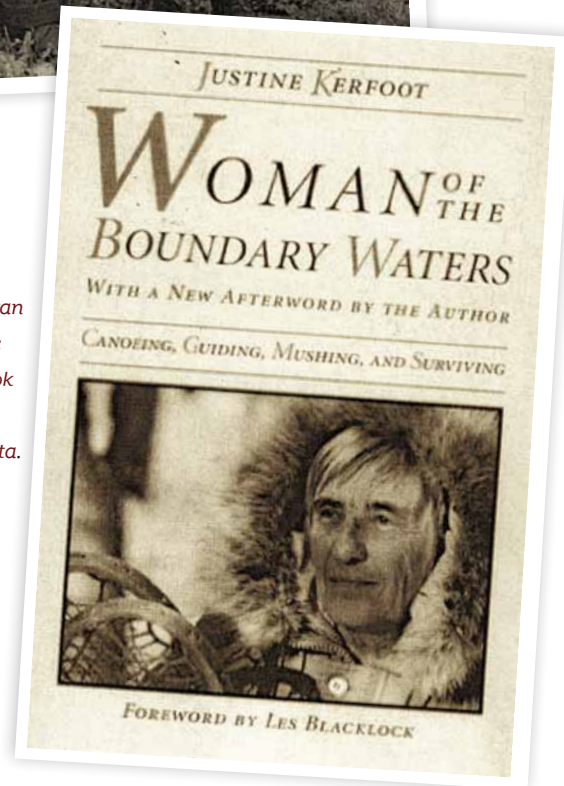
Justine became a legend of the North Woods. Well into her 80s she could pack a canoe, mush dog sleds, snowshoe, trap, fish, and hunt. She became friends with the Native Americans who had a trading post at the lodge. Her son Bruce said that “she was a pioneer in the sense we don’t even know in our generation.” Once her children took over the lodge management, Justine took adventurous journeys all over the world.

In 1986 she wrote a memoir of her 60 years along the Gunflint Trail, “Woman of the Boundary Waters.” In the introduction she describes the turning point in her life: “An infinitesimal speck in the cosmos, I stood beneath a great white pine—matriarch of a fast vanishing tribe. And I knew I was home. I was 21. The year was 1927.”

Justine Spinner Kerfoot died in 2001 at the age of 94 at Grand Marais, Minn. Tributes poured in from all over the state.



George and Mae Lane Spinner, c. 1930.



George and Mae Lane Spinner’s daughter, Justine Spinner Kerfoot, ran the Gunflint Lodge and wrote this book about her life in Northern Minnesota.



She was a daughter of Barrington, one who took her pioneer heritage and survived magnificently in the harsh conditions of the Boundary Waters. U

Barbara L. Benson grew up in Kent, England, and later moved to New York. She settled in Barrington and has walked with our history since first arriving here in 1980. (Photo: Susan McConnell)