
The resort era overlapped the Prohibition era, and the island became very popular because of being on the Canadian border. Nearly everyone in the area was a Rumrunner of sorts in those days. It was almost impossible to catch anyone in the marsh and canals because there were so many places to hide. A combination of events brought the Island's resort area to an end. The sinking of the Tashmoo, the end of prohibition, the automobile and the succession of costly hotel fires were among them. The only hotel surviving today is the Idle Hour, now a private club, the Idle Hour Yacht Club. In addition, The Old Club, organized in 1872 as the private Lake St. Clair Fishing and Shooting Club, is still in existence.

In 1921, a few men who had a vision of the future, ventured to lease a large acreage of marsh below Harsens Island for right of way for a road. Nearly one hundred acres were given to the County so the State could build this road which was a necessity. In March 1926, a group of residents met and formed the Green Drive Committee. The first committee consisted of Jules W. Bern, Chairman, Wm. H. Green, Jr., Louis W. Lindeman, Otto Helm, Wm. J. Windisch, Secretary, Jas. Clay, Wm Beyster and Jas. Bell. It was the efforts of these individuals and those who followed on the committee that resulted in the existence of Green Drive.

RUSSELL ISLAND

Russell Island is located between Algonac and Walpole Island and separates the St. Clair River into the North and South Channels. The south side of the Island is separated from Harsens Island by a narrow channel called the Indian Cut, which runs between the North and South Channels. Russell Island is actually (3) islands, comprised of approximately (200) acres, divided by canals and cuts and connected by wooden bridges. It is a private island with more than (100) cottages; there is no public land on the island. The only access to the Island is by private boat or the passenger ferry "Islander", presently owned and operated by Bud Breitmeyer. However, for many years, in the early part of the century, passenger steamships such as the Tashmoo, Wauketa and the Owana made regular stops at Russell Island during the summers. The "Islander" docks next to the Walpole Island ferry at the U. S. Customs and Immigration dock in the Algonac city park

The first person to attempt to settle on Russell Island was Christian Frederick Denke, a Moravian missionary from Nazareth Hall, PA. He came in the spring of 1802 to establish a mission for the Chippewas with the permission of Chief Nangi who was camping on Pointe du Chene. Denke was staying with the Harsen family while he was building a cabin on Russell Island. Denke finished the cabin on Russell Island and continued to work with the Chippewas. He translated Bible passages and hymns into the Chippewa language, by candlelight, at a hand-hewn table. However, the Chippewa's were more hungry for food than for the word of God and Denke's small crop of potatoes and tobacco did not last long. They eventually became hostile toward Denke because they blamed him for the government's action prohibiting liquor sales to the Indians. He then abandoned the mission on Russell Island in March 1803.

Lewis I. Brakeman and his wife Candace are known to have settled there shortly after the War of 1812. It appears that Brakeman's right to the land north of Canoe Cut was recognized under an agreement with the Harsens who owned and occupied the private claims on the upper part of Harsens Island. ** This property was later called Indian Island.

A portion of the Island came into the ownership of Ernestus Corning. In 1855, he and his wife Harriet conveyed ownership to Samuel Russell.

Samuel Russell owned Russell Island from 1855 to 1858. Mr. Russell was one of the most prominent men in the county and held many positions of trust. He was a man in politics, and was connected by ties of kinship with one of the oldest and most cultured families in the State. He was Custom House Officer in 1856, Clay Township Justice of the Peace in 1861, Sheriff of St. Clair County in 1865 and 1866 and was Clay Township Supervisor in 1862, 1869, 1871, 1875 and 1876. Mr. Russell died at Algonac, December 31, 1879. The Island was named after this prominent pioneer.

About 1905, Algonac businessmen put up \$1,700, obtained through voluntary subscription and taxes, in order to secure control of Russell Island from the Detroit, Belle Isle. & Windsor Ferry Co., to create a summer resort.

They constructed Camp Algonac, a tent city also called White City, on Russell Island. Excursions ran from Pittsburgh, PA, Cincinnati, OH, Terre Haute, IN and other inland cities. The passengers arrived in Detroit by train, took the steam boats to Algonac and were ferried to the Island in naphtha launches to the dock at Camp Algonac. An advertisement boasted "In All The World, No trip Like This." The Island was described as the "Gem Of The Great Lakes." The camp was approximately (187) acres, in the center of which was a beautifully shaded oak grove of (43) acres with walks, swings and rustic seats. There was a constant moving panorama of steam ships passing the island averaging one every four minutes. Twelve to twenty huge freighters at one time passing up and down the South Channel was a common sight. The population of the Island sometimes numbered 2,000 at a time.

The original plat of the island was revised in 1920 to provide additional drainage through the construction of a longitudinal canal commencing at the upper end of the Island on the North Channel. In 1927, the lower island was made habitable by a canal paralleling the South Channel and intersecting the Canoe Cut at right angles.

The Russell Island Property Owners Association represents the local interests of the Islanders, maintains the Association playgrounds and docks, subsidizes the passenger ferry. The only transportation to get about the Island is by bicycle, powered golf cart or by foot. Once each spring and fall, an auto caravan is scheduled and Champions Ferry makes a special trip to enable cottagers to transport the kind of articles and equipment which require a car. In the winter cottagers cross to Harsens Island, leave their cars at the Grand Pointe Cut and walk up the shore and cross Indian Cut. Despite the fact that there comes a time when the spring thaw and an ice jammed river make the Island inaccessible, there is a firm determination on the part of most Islanders against joining Harsens and Russell Island by a road. Cottagers are quite willing to sacrifice the obvious convenience of driving to their back doors for the privilege of being far from the multitude of problems which seem to invariably accompany the automobile.