

I S L A N D I T E M S

The person who has spent more time on Russell Island, and knows more about its early history, than anyone else in the world, is a petite, 76 year-old lady who lives at 1013 St. Clair Boulevard, Algonac, Michigan.

Mrs. George Brown, of course.

Mrs. Brown remembers that when, in March, 1916, her husband signed a contract with the Russell Island Company to serve as caretaker of its proposed new development, their Algonac friends were horrified.

"People in Algonac had never made any use of the island," she recalled. "The only time I ever heard of anyone staying there was one summer when some steel company put up tents and let its employees vacation in them. You could see this big array of tents from Algonac and we called it White City.

"The common belief in Algonac at the time was that the island was full of wood-ticks and if you set foot on it you were apt to get bitten practically to death. When our friends heard that we were planning to live over there they said to us: Not that horrible place -- with the Indians right across the channel!"

"But George knew something of the island. One summer he had worked for a farmer who has pastured cattle there. They swam the herd over in the spring and swam them back to the mainland in the fall. George assured me there was no danger from wood-ticks or Indians either."

The Browns moved to the Island in August, 1916. At the time they had three daughters, aged two to five, and were destined to have two more girls. The youngest Kay, now Mrs. Catherine Gordon of Cleveland, is one of the very few people in the world who can claim Russell Island as their birthplace.

When the Browns moved onto the island the old Big Dock already was completed, as were the Carpenter, Brooke, and Hannan cottages. But the Brown home was still under construction.

"I suppose they had to build the Big Dock first before they could land the materials for the first cottages," Mrs. Brown said. "Until our house was completed we lived in a building that later became one of the out-buildings behind the house."

When the big, two-story home finally was completed it was snug and well-built with a big coal furnace but, of course there was no electricity. Water was pumped by hand.

"We had a big tank in the attic and every noon George would have one of the Indian Workmen pump it full," Mrs. Brown said.

Illumination was furnished by Kerosene lamps and cooking was done on a wood range but this was not considered a particular hardship because the same conditions would prevail in all the first cottages.

Several of the early lot buyers lived in tents while their cottages were being planned or built. They had some adventures with skunks and the Brown family's domestic animals and after a time living in tents was prohibited.

One of these early tenters, who had her share of experiences, is still on the island -- Mrs. Irene Gerds.

(Mrs. Brown has so many interesting recollections of the Island's early days that, God willing, there will be more installments of her story in future issues of this periodical.)

Al Traux and Phyllis Scott still are receiving compliments on their arrangements for last January 22nd Russell Island Fling, by general consensus the most enjoyable Island gathering ever held in the off season.

With such a successful beginning there would seem to be a good chance that the affair will become an annual event.

The whole idea resulted from a casual conversation last fall between Al and Joyce Traux and Jim and Phyllis Scott, who probably did not realize all the work they were letting themselves in for.

Thanks went also to Ruth Laramie and Dick Dinan for floral contributions; to the small but stentorian Alliners, probably the only Mexican polka band in existence; to E & B enterprises for providing such pleasant quarters, and to all the guests who came in a warm, non-argumentative mood and spent the entire evening in the same spirit.

Death came in January to one of the Island pioneers, Harry Rancourt, 89, of 2281 West Grand Blvd. Mr. Rancourt and a son, Fr. Cyril, bought one of the first Island cottages, that now is occupied by the family of another son, Harry Rancourt.

Andy Pipher has been selected president for the coming year of the Native Born Detroiters Club, the membership of which is restricted to persons born in Detroit. Andy and Louise celebrated their forty-fifth wedding anniversary February 5.

The Andy Pipers remained a lap behind Lee and Ruth Sloan who had celebrated their Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary a few weeks earlier. Their children, including the Auby Glancys, Jerry Washburns and Bob Sloans held a reception for the couple.

Until the announcement was printed few of us knew that Lee, all these years, really has been "Leo", and that Jerry actually is "Thomas".

Another Island couple has a long way to go to its first anniversary. Billy Buesser, younger son of the Fred Buessers, was married January 6 to Barbara Heckel, of Barrington, Illinois. Billy is a senior at the University of Michigan and the couple are living in Saline.

Still farther behind is Sandra Lee Hall, daughter of Eli and Betty Heick, who will be married to George Kalman of Detroit, April 30.

Rob LaJoie, one of the Island children of a generation ago and his brother-in-law, Jack Joliet, husband of former Russell Island girl, Rosemary LaJoie, soon will open their fourth Detroit-area restaurant.

The brothers-in-law operate the popular Sign of the Beekeeper restaurants on Woodward in Royal Oak and across from Eastland and the Howard Johnson restaurant

at 3310 North Woodward, Royal Oak. The new restaurant will be another Beefeater opposite Northland.

Bob and Rosemary are the children, of course of Jane and the late Ernest P. (Larry) LaJoie. Larry was the first president of the Russell Island Property Owners Association and held the office for eleven consecutive terms, a record not apt to be equalled very often.

Something of a Russell Island winter colony is developing in the Florida Area around Pompano Beach and Fort Lauderdale, north of Miami.

Island families too numerous to mention vacationed in the area this winter, one reason being that at least five Islanders and former Islanders own permanent homes there.

The Howard Terneses and Walter Gieseckings own homes in Pompano as do Mrs. Fred Coxon, widow of a former Russell Island Association president, and Wilt Marcero, George Brown son-in-law and one time operator of the old Russell Island grocery.

The Arthurs Underwoods own a home in nearby Fort Lauderdale. Most of the Jessie Carpenter family lives in Delray Beach and West Palm Beach. The Oscar Carlsons have an apartment in Miami.

NOTICE: Anyone wishing to sell their golf cart, or know of one for sale, please contact Jim Montrieul at 293-5163.

The system is so strange that it defies description. If you don't believe any phone call could be that confusing, try it some time.

Queried about the situation, Michigan Bell men looked uncomfortable and said the matter will be corrected "before long".

They explained that they inherited the embarrassment from the small company that organized the first Algonac exchanges many years ago. They said the same peculiar dialling method still exists in a few other scattered sections of the state.

On the subject of our public utilities, an inquiry addressed to the post office department elicited the information that there are only four Postal Water Routes operated in Michigan.

They go to Mackinac Island and Drummond Island in the Straits of Mackinac and to Beaver Island and North Manitow Island in Northern Lake Michigan.

Asked how the Russell Island route is classified, the postal transportation superintendent said it is a Star Route, meaning operated by a private contractor, George Webster.

Whatever it is, our system would seem to be unique in the state. Where else can you have a group of passing children call to you:

"There's a card for you in the mail box. From your Aunt Jane. She's having a wonderful time in Yellowstone Park and plans to stop to see you next week".

Florence Anderson, wife of Oxeby Anderson and thus a member-in-law of the pioneer family that opened up the western sector of our Island, died October 21. Florence is survived, in addition to Oxeby, by four children, Mrs. Barbara Johansson, Harold, Debra, and Dennis, and her father, Howard Jacobs.

An Island romance culminated in the wedding, October 7, of Pat, daughter of Peg Traister, and Bob, son of Jack Negriock.

The wedding, in St. Bede's Church, Southfield, was followed by a reception at Rotunda Country Inn.

Bob is working for Continental Aviation and Engineering Corp. and the young couple have bought a home in St. Clair Shores.

P.S. The Gerald Markers, now cottage owners on the Island, add to the Hamel Clan. They fall into the second cousin category. So who has the numerical edge?

The Board of Directors of the Island is aware of the increase in taxes and is looking into the situation. They will meet with the Tax Review Board on behalf of the Association in March.
