

SOURDOUGH ISLAND

A couple news items in the Missoulian newspaper have had some relevance to the local history of the Seeley Lake area.

The sale of the Montana Island Resort is on a historic island in our big backyard known as Sourdough Island. (http://missoulian.com/news/local/university-of-montana-foundation-confirms-sale-of-montana-island-lodge/article_8fe62050-5537-593a-afe4-ef904dd28205.html)

The 1918 “Wobbly Massacre” in Milltown could have influenced the original occupant of Sourdough Island. (http://missoulian.com/news/local/story-of-wobbly-massacre-in-milltown-in-wwi-bears-scrutiny/article_f0eb7da9-484d-519b-a7d9-02ca4d8a8712.html)

The Sourdough Island name comes from “Sourdough” Dave Madson, an early day logger who worked in the logging camps in the Blackfoot Valley. Some say he was a renegade. Some people called him an agitator during the days of the I.W.W. -- "the I Won't Work" days. But he may have come into the area shortly after the Wobbly Massacre in Milltown. Dave finally was "black-balled" at the area lumber camps. It has been speculated that perhaps the owner of the logging company gave the island to Dave as a way to get them out of their hair. Others say he just wanted to live where people wouldn't bother him. The Fish and Game Department had attempted to rid the lake of "trash " fish and had put Dave in charge of netting squawfish by dozens. Dave had no qualms about using the heap of fish at his back door to supplement his diet. He spent most of his days hunting and fishing near his cabins on the island, frequently inviting a close friend for a bowl of fish stew.

His cabin now serves as the pump house for the Montana Island Lodge.

A contraceptive-sponge millionaire named Bruce Vorhauer, whose life later spiraled into tragedy, built the 18,000-square-foot, seven-bedroom, seven-bathroom log-cabin style retreat on the island in 1984. At the time Vorhauer said he “had an unlimited budget to build it, and exceeded it.” Every room has a view of the lake and undiluted frontcountry. Inside, there are five rock fireplaces, a huge master suite, and a great room large enough for 30 guests. The facility also includes a dock and boat storage, a two-bedroom shorehouse, and a helipad. He lost his money in a failed 1989 bid for U.S. Senate and a lawsuit over a tragic car accident. Failure to renew the patent on his contraceptive also contributed to his financial downfall. During the financial crisis, Vorhauer lit his Seattle yacht on fire in 1991 to try to collect the insurance, and lost his home to foreclosure. He ended up going bankrupt and committing suicide in 1992.

Vorhauer evidently was indebted to University of Montana benefactor and businessman Dennis Washington who bought the foreclosed home at auction and donated it to the University of Montana Foundation in 1995. They operated it as a money losing retreat until purchased by the owner affiliated with the Resort at Paws Up Resort in Greenough in late 2017. The “Island Lodge at Salmon Lake” is now one of their offerings, at likely one of the higher rates in the Clearwater Valley.