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Foreword

It was a fortunate day for the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society Museum and for me personally when Mike Gora stopped in to say hello and talk about the islands. In the course of our conversations we found out that in addition to local history, we shared a common interest in books about the islands – particularly books that were no longer in print. Before long, Mike approached us with an interesting idea. He proposed that we collaborate on reprinting Lydia Ryall's *Sketches and Stories of the Lake Erie Islands*. This was an exciting proposal that would benefit anyone with an interest in the Lake Erie Islands. It became even more exciting when the scope of the book grew to become much larger than just Lydia Ryall's material.

Lydia's books, the original and the Centennial Edition, are difficult to find and expensive to purchase. Researchers or other people, who just want to learn more about our beloved islands, were faced with spending hours of reading in research museums. Mike's idea of reprinting would mean more people could enjoy Miss Ryall's wonderful book.

Although related to many island families, such as the Holly, Webster, Shortliff, Greenman and Flint families, Lydia Ryall was not born on the island. Like so many of us, she fell in love with the Lake Erie Islands when she visited the area from her home in inland Ohio. She became a resident of Put-in-Bay in the 1890s and lived on the island into the 1900s, possibly until 1915. She wrote for the Sandusky Register for twelve years, from 1889 to 1901, under the pseudonym of Theresa Thorndale. Detailing the life and news of the islands, she soon became a familiar sight to islanders. Using her writing talents and knowledge of almost everyone in the community, she undertook writing a book about the Lake Erie Islands and their inhabitants.

Each small story stands on its own, but when read as a whole, they give the reader a unique overview. Filled with fanciful description and flowery language, Miss Ryall gives us a glimpse into the island life of the time that wouldn't be seen otherwise. Her book gives historians valuable information that can be used in their research on the islands. There has been some debate over her accuracy, but no one can doubt her enthusiasm. She viewed island life with a romantic eye and a sense of adventure, but at the same time caught the "flavor" of island life.

Once the decision had been made to reprint the book, Mike shot into action. He began digitizing and cleaning up the images for clarity. Emails flew back and forth as every effort was made to maintain the historical integrity of the book. The whole museum staff was involved. Pat Page, our Gift Shop Manager, painstakingly proof read every single word. Susie Cooper, Museum Director, was doing genealogy research on Lydia Ryall and I was searching through the archives looking for pictures for Mike. Then Mike did something that puts all historians in his debt. He added a large amount of material, indexed the book and made it a true research tool. With Mike doing the lion's share of the work, we soon found

that there was a wealth of additional information that was begging to be reprinted. Information began to flow in. Thus was born the newly re-titled *Lake Erie Islands – Sketches and Stories of the First Century after the Battle of Lake Erie*. This book offers far more than we had originally planned. With the additional images, diary entries and biographies, it has become a researcher’s dream, while still remaining an interesting book to read. Mike has been careful to keep Lydia’s book separate and in its entirety in Part 1 of the book while enhancing it through material in five additional sections.

Throughout the long process, Mike has kept his enthusiasm and humor – not an easy job when facing over 400 pages of information. He’s even talking about a second book dealing with the Second Century after the Battle of Lake Erie.

As I said in the beginning of this foreword, it was a fortunate day when Mike Gora walked in the door. Lydia Ryall’s book is once again given the attention it deserves and I made a good friend.

Barbara A. Cooper
Curator
Lake Erie Islands Historical Society

Lake Erie Islands – Sketches and Stories

Introduction

There is no single volume that covers so much history of all of the Lake Erie Islands as Lydia Ryall's 1913 "Sketches and Stories of the Lake Erie Islands". With the sub-title "Perry Centennial Edition 1813-1913" to distinguish it from an earlier 1898 work, Ms. Ryall's book has always been in demand, with the result that it has become more and more difficult to find an original copy.

The Lake Erie Islands Historical Society and I agreed that if there was a single book to be published that covered the history of all of the islands, this would be the core of it. This is clearly a book that needed to be digitized and made available again.

The text has been newly typeset, and the pictures have been enhanced digitally, to clean up dirt and scratches and restore faded images where feasible.

We decided to correct purely typographical errors in the original, but to footnote rather than fix incorrectly spelled names. We also decided to add a complete index to make the work more useful for historical research.

After asking a number of individuals for their opinion, we decided to make the book more complete and more unique by adding 5 more major sections.

As a result, the book grew significantly. And it grew in unexpected ways. The book has 266 images, while Lydia Ryall's had just 212.

First, we added a section (Part 2) with bonus pictures. The original idea was simply to complement a few of Lydia Ryall's images with higher quality versions of the same scenes. But it quickly became apparent that the publication of this book was a unique opportunity to add new images, some of which have never been published before or been available to the public.

Second, in Part 3, we included all the entries about the Lake Erie Islands from Major Joseph Delafield's diary of his visits in 1820-21 as the American Agent for the International Boundary Commission defining the border between the U.S. and Canada.

Third, we added all the 45 islander biographies from Nevin Winter's 1917 3-volume "History of Northwest Ohio" in Part 6. These have never been re-published before, and provide an important perspective on Lake Erie Island history. And there some wonderful pictures of the islanders in the Winter books that we also included.

Last, we added bios and information from Ottawa County directories/atlasses from 1874 and 1881 (and made these Parts 4 and 5 to keep the chronological sequence correct) because they provide an important complement to the 1917 information.

We didn't want to re-write history yet again, but agreed that adding to it and making it easily available was an excellent idea. We hope that you enjoy the result.

It has been created with much assistance from Barbara Cooper, curator of the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society, and all the other staff members mentioned in Barbara's foreword. I give great thanks to her and to all the other individuals who contributed in some way to making this book possible.

I would also like to give special thanks to Don Rhodes for his contributions about Catawba Island, to Jim Kuemmel for Middle Bass material about the Kuemmel Fisheries, and to Robin Burris-Cadez who grew up on North Bass Island, for her contributions about that wonderful and remote place.

Michael Gora
Middle Bass Island, Ohio

Lake Erie Islands – Sketches and Stories

Index

Indexing is not a science, especially when dealing with historical matter with many spelling errors. “Never forget that luck and error are the handmaidens of all research,” as someone once said.

While this index contains most surnames in the book, it does not include the names of all the brothers, sisters, children and parents mentioned. Many of the families tended to have many children, so the number of first names mentioned only incidentally as part of a list of names in a family is rather large, and these names have generally not been indexed. The only surnames intentionally not indexed are those in Part 4 which refer to family members in different states or countries. Many names in that section have no relationship to the Lake Erie Islands, so we decided that including them would just create index clutter.

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