



An Excellent Find

Just recently, I was speaking to Carroll Terry. She is the granddaughter of one of the former owners of our cottage (William K Terry and Helen Suydam Terry). While I was explaining my history quest to her, she remembered having some old 16 mm films of the Middle Bass Club. Some of the footage appears to have been shot by her grandfather, and some by his brother in law, Horace W. Suydam. (Horace Suydam had also owned our cottage—from 1924 to 1932. Upon his death in January of 1932, the property passed to his sister Helen Suydam Terry.)

The exciting thing about this find is that many of the names of the people on the films are catalogued on the boxes containing the films. Also, it is footage from the Club in the late 1920s.

Carroll graciously sent the films to me for restoration/reproduction in digital format. After I initially inspected the films, I forwarded them to a professional restoration lab to have the work done.

It's always questionable when one is dealing with old films: cellulose acetate does degrade over time, and the level of degradation affects how well the original images can be "brought back". However, digital enhancement technologies have come a long way.

When the films arrived here, they showed some signs of warpage (curling at the edges), as well as edge damage. However, the good news is that they didn't have that strong vinegar smell characteristic of films that are in a highly degraded form. Since the

professional lab handles the films manually and images each frame digitally, even though the films cannot be run on a projector ever again, a true digital copy of the moving pictures can be produced and run on a DVD player just as if it was the film itself.

Additionally, the lab will stabilize the films chemically so that their degradation is halted. This makes it possible to re-image from the films in the future should that be necessary.

Family surnames that figure prominently in these films are: Suydam, Mennel, Brooks, Berdan, Norton, Kinsey, Beckwith, and MacAbee, to name a few.

I've enclosed an order form if you would like a copy of this DVD. Profits from the sale will be donated to the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society.

Prohibition as a Social Force at Middle Bass Club

In discussions with many of you, it has impressed me what a potent role alcohol played in the issues of the times at Middle Bass Club. Some of the families with whom I've connected experienced a high level of alcoholism and suicides — and it's not just in one "Middle Bass Club" family! I've been curious about this, and soliciting comments from all of you on the subject. A few of you responded that Prohibition had a lot to do with it. Perhaps it is the allure of the forbidden, perhaps it had something to do with alcohol being a social lubricant, and perhaps it had

a lot to do with the fact that hard liquor was easy to make back then. Beer and lower alcohol content beverages had to be fairly uncommon during that period since they required more expertise and equipment to prepare.

Many of the outings at the Club in the late 20s became "about" alcohol — where to go to get it, how to hide it, and then summarily, drinking it. It certainly put a lot of emphasis in that direction, which could have fueled excess consumption. Was alcohol more valued due to it being less attainable? Quite possibly.

I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts on the subject. Obviously, drinking and general merriment at the Lonz Winery had always been a factor up until 2000 when the pavilion collapsed there. But many of us might have assumed that alcohol was all about the "younger" postwar generation...when in fact, it may have played a more crucial role in the early social fabric of the Club (and in individual family histories) than many of us had realized.

Send me your stories and ideas on this topic. We can all learn a lot from the past!

What's Going On....

After a busy holiday season, I am just now getting back to work on the history quest. I made a couple of great new contacts just before Christmas, and I hope to be able to visit with some of you soon. I've put together a "traveling historian" set of equipment to be able to quickly and efficiently collect photos and data: a digital camera that has the ability to take up-close shots (macro) for items that are three-dimensional or unscannable in some fashion, and a laptop computer and scanner so that I can make high resolution copies of photos on the spot. Obviously, a few of you have some great memories of having grown up on the island as well, and these oral histories are important. What I plan on doing is putting together a list of questions and getting it out to you for your input. This will help me learn a lot about what life was like in the Middle Bass Club during your time there.

I had a good conversation with my film restorer Paul today (1/3/06) and told him that I am making some interesting contacts out there, and that many of them are in their 60s, 70s, and 80s. The interesting part is that many of the memories you are sharing with me are things you remember

from being a kid on the island. I told Paul that essentially, I am seeing the Club through the eyes of "old children" as it were: adult minds processing children's experiences. It's an interesting view. I wish I could take a time machine back to the island and also see what your grandparents thought and felt and did back then also. But your impressions are all that remains, so it is important to capture these and infer the rest from whispers here and there that tell a bit about what the grownups were up to as well. I did locate some old Middle Bass Club postcards, and there were hints here and there in these. Evidently, postcards used to be all the rage; in the present day, many of us send a postcard when we're on vacation (if at all), but it seems that back then, people sent postcards as a matter of course (or at least some people did). The picture subject of the card may have also been a way of telling someone what was going on. I was flabbergasted to see one that depicted the Club fire of 9/2/1909. The postmark on the card was 9/25/1909. Evidently, no time was wasted in getting the event immortalized as a postcard.



Picture from the 1909 fire, already the subject of a postcard within three weeks after the event!

Some of you have already seen this postcard. What is interesting to me about it is that it shows our place at the left of the photo. We have the rear lower portion of the house as well as the taller structure behind it. We'd always heard that the lower structure was an add on. If so, it had obviously been added on prior to this picture being taken. You may notice the appearance of some sort of patches on the lower roof; these were wet blankets that were placed there to keep the fire from spreading to our house. All in all, this fire took down four cottages; we were lucky that the wind direction was such that the fire was not able to spread to our place!

Winter Trip to the Island

Jeff and I made a quick trip to the island in January to check on things. The interesting thing this year is that Lake Erie has not frozen, so the ice fishermen have been quite out of luck. Also, usually the ferry stops running to Middle Bass around Thanksgiving and starts up again in late March. However, there has been some ferry activity to and from the islands even through the winter, which certainly has made provisioning easier for the year round islanders.

We flew up one Sunday and drove over to the house. A quick check of things showed there had been no raccoon infestations (something all cottage owners worry about, as the critters are quite destructive). Also, no major deadfall from trees or other debris was present.

The interesting thing was that when I walked out to the water, there was some skim ice at the edge of the lake. With the movement of the water, these plates of ice would break and stack up at the edges of the lake. I had heard that winter storms can cause huge pile-ups of these plates at the water's edge, pushing inland and damaging buildings and docks nearby.

However, on this particular day, there was just minimal ice buildup; it has an unusual clacking sound, like a bunch of melamine dinner plates bumping against one another.

After our quick tour of the house and grounds, we

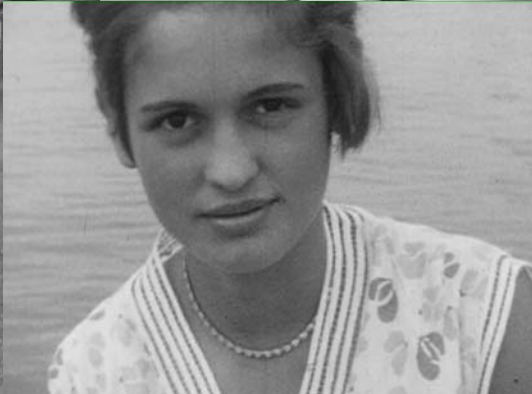
headed back to Columbus and probably won't see the house again until we decide to open up in early April.

The picture below shows the Club with a good snowfall back in the early 1900s.



Some Club Pictures to Share with You....

All of these photos are stills from the DVD "People of Middle Bass Club (1928—1931)". If you know who any of them are, please drop me a line!



**MIDDLE BASS CLUB
HISTORY PROJECT**

Lisa Fine
4455 Olentangy River Rd.
Delaware, OH 43015
Phone: 614-863-5940
Home: 740-369-1598
Fax: 614-863-5941
Email: lisahahn@iwaynet.net OR
lisafine2@yahoo.com

***Sharing the past....as we look
towards the future!***

An open invitation:

Jeff and I would like to invite you to visit the Middle Bass Club and our cottage during open season (late June— early September is the best time weatherwise). Please contact us if you are interested and we'll help facilitate your visit.

Ego....or what?

It's just a hypothesis of mine...but since I can only get glimmers of history through the evidence that remains, I often have to guess at what my forebears might have been thinking in their day...

In wandering around the Club grounds, I took stock of the layout of the houses one late summer day last year, and remarked to friends that I wish I could have taken a time machine back to the late 1800s to see what was going on at the Club then.

As far as the early Club goes, it is certain that one Frank Isherwood bought several lots across from where the proposed Clubhouse was being built in 1872. He built the first cottage for himself on one of the front lots facing the Clubhouse/ Grove area., and sold off the adjacent lots to other prominent Toledo businessmen.

These other guys built MUCH bigger cottages on their lots. I wonder if Frank was feeling a bit dwarfed by his neighbors and decided to upsize as a result? Anyhow, whatever the reason, he did move his original cottage to another lot behind his, and built a much bigger cottage on his same lot in 1884 or thereabouts. And when I say bigger, I mean it: the roof of the Isherwood cottage towers above all of the cottages around it. And here's the interesting part: you can practically walk from this cottage onto the roof of either neighbor. Now that's zero lot line for you!

You don't see this kind of encroachment anywhere else in the Club. So I have to believe that Isherwood hated to be upstaged and went big just to show he could.



Frank Isherwood's first cottage, with owners Terry and Shirley Daniel. The room extending from the right of the cottage is a much later addition; the original cottage was very small!



Frank Isherwood's second cottage, at left. Even the side gable towers above the neighbor. The actual main roofline is even higher. Note how easy (!) it is for my stepson to walk from roof to roof. The gap between the Isherwood cottage and the house on its other side is even LESS!

Another interesting fact: there used to be a bell installed in the bedroom closet of the Isherwood house; a wire ran from the bell across the (small) gap to the Shoemaker-Beckwith house (I'm standing on their roof, below). The wire entered a small bedroom and ended at a push button installed on the window frame. Now what might THAT have been for, this one way signaling system? I've heard speculations that someone was having a secret liaison with someone in the other house, but as of yet, no ghosts are talking! From the appearance of the push button and bell, it is likely that the system was in use in the 1920s or slightly before.



Me measuring the distance between roofs on the other side of the Isherwood cottage. To be fair, about 1.5' of this roof was added on sometime in the early part of the 1900s to accommodate a small kitchen. But even without the extension, one could (carefully) step from our closet window onto the next door roof, as I have done here.