



## Bassett Island

*There are no chipmunks on Marion Island and Bassett Islands, no porcupines, deer or raccoon, though there is a fox who has recently changed his hole and dug a new one beneath a great fallen tree. Few plants grow high on the forest floor, beneath a light canopy of sun-filtered green from tall trees which have kept only their upper limbs, which seem hundreds of feet up. A sense of vast penetrating depth lies ahead, though I have already stepped into the magic that this forest holds.*

By Carolyn Lewis

Fred and Tina Tank know the waters well from



Caretakers Tina and Fred Tank

Bowers Harbor dock to the dock at Marion Island. On the day my husband and I visit them, in their capacity as caretakers of Marion and Bassett, the two men are standing by the wheel of the

boat, my husband beside Fred, interested, as always, in how things *work*. Tina offers me a light plastic chair that is not nailed down. Seaworthy as I am, a native of the

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## From the President's Desk

### Greetings!

Considering that known Old Mission Peninsula history covers only 160 years (unlike New England's 360 years), and considering the peninsula's relative smallness, we have little to explore. Yet even our local history offers interesting lessons and stories of committed lives, courageous adventures, or just common endurance. And it is our own! -- by people who apparently loved the area as much as we do.

Old Mission Peninsula Historical Society was originally organized to preserve the Hessler log cabin to remember pioneer farmers and fishermen surviving and even thriving without modern conveniences. The cabin had a very successful 2009 summer of visitors, donations, and upkeep. Diamond dust was packed on the paths around the cabin, a second tree was dedicated, and a serviceberry bush planted. After an active two-year term, Paul Burns is retiring as the Cabin Chairman. A new chairman is needed. Please consider this important position as yours!

Dougherty house progress includes the icehouse open house and the happy days August 1950s fundraiser. Work included a new lawn, breaking of a winding woodchip trail through the fields and woods behind the house (accomplished with the help of Michigan Works and our own volunteers), and the stabilization and re-roofing of the 3-holer "necessary" (to be completed in the spring). Check them both out!



The Tree Committee has been busy planting new trees (52!) and the Oral History Committee is reconvening. Donna Hornberger is doing an excellent job with programs. November's program was a video of volunteers reconstructing the icehouse last summer (2008), December's will be the holiday party.

All our activity is done by volunteers. What an

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# Rebecca Tompkins Nothstine's Roadside Tree Restorations *A Decade's Worth of New Trees*

By Ann Swaney

By 1999, the Old Mission Peninsula Historical Society's initiative to restore the Hessler Log Cabin was well under way, and the Historical Society was looking for a new project. The "Tree Project" began simply in September 1999 with the planting of some small maple trees dug up from Leo and Rebecca Nothstine's woods. The purpose of the project as recorded in a memo Rebecca submitted to OMPHS was *"To encourage, initiate and facilitate the planting and replanting of trees on Old Mission Peninsula to provide beauty, shade and windbreak for residents and visitors."*

Under her early leadership, the OMPHS took on the project of planting young trees where historical trees, some over a century old, had once lined the roadways on the northern end of Old Mission Peninsula.

The older trees were dead or dying and the Grand Traverse County Road Commission had been steadily removing them. Landowners and regular highway users were beginning to notice the loss. With help from the Township, the Road Commission, the Old Mission Women's club, the Old Mission Agricultural Preservation League, and the teachers and children in Old Mission Elementary School, volunteers planted approximately 60 trees in 2000. Rob Manigold, Peninsula Township Supervisor, was quoted as saying that "Rebecca Nothstine, as president of the historical society has really taken this [project] and run with it."

Early members of the Tree Committee included Bret Richards, Rob Manigold, Bern Kroupa, Cal Jamison, Patty Rudolph, Penny Rosi, John Wunsch, Jack Solomon-

son, Jackie Tompkins-Weede, Deni Hooper, Lew Coulter, Chuck Meyer, Bernie Moritz, and Bob Dean. There have been additional volunteers through the years, but leading the charge have always been Leo & Rebecca Nothstine. Rebecca seems to know every tree by species and where it was planted. Each year she made the rounds noting which trees were dead or dying, making sure they were replaced. Still, she is persistent in her call to plant even more trees. According to Cal Jamieson, Rebecca was "absolutely gung-ho in getting everyone involved. In the

beginning she would invite folks to her house, even baking cookies to make sure 'certain people' attended." Cal says that Leo really got her started. Leo had the passion for this project and recruited Rebecca who, as a former local school teacher and nearly life-long resident here, knows everyone. Riding along Center Road with

Rebecca is a not-to-be forgotten experience. She loves to point out all the trees, and explain the circumstances by which they were planted.

I was reminded of Rebecca and Leo when recently I came home from an afternoon walk and saw the two lovely trees which were planted by the Tree Committee several years ago on our property along Center Road. All we have to do is water and care for them, the Tree Committee has already done the hard work.

As of September, 2009, over 300 trees have been planted by the OMPHS Tree Committee. There are over 78 memorial trees with plaques, 32 from this year alone. In October, a local Boy Scout troop volunteered to help

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Rebecca and Leo at a Recent Society Meeting



## Bassett Island

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great lakes, the daughter of sea captains and farmers, I enjoy the thrilling bump of the five-foot swells and the colding wind and the spray of the water, laughing, as if I were once more a child in a boat going out on the bay to throw in a line for small-mouth bass and perch.

When we arrive, we have come five miles across the water from Bowers Harbor through five foot swells, watching the Boathouse Restaurant slip further and further away.

Frederick Hall acquired the islands in the 1880s, and named the big island "Marion," for Marion Hall, his wife. In 1987, the island's name was changed to Power Island, for a man named Power who marketed microfilms, giving money to preserve it. Marion Island has had many names, most, if not all, based on owners, who

named it for themselves: Marion, Power, Rennie, Bassett, people who chose to put ownership to it. In 1975, though, both islands went to public ownership and became a park, run by the Civic Center in Traverse City.

The topographical map Tina has graciously given me to study shows evidence of a glacial lake called Nipissing on the island's western side, existing 3,000 years ago. Further inland are indications of a second glacial shoreline, called Glacial Lake Algonquin, existing 8,000 years ago. The southern part of the island shows 226 feet in height.

Stepping onto Marion Island, and into the forest, whose paths and creatures and trees are cared for so lov-

ingly by Fred and Tina Tank, I have the sense of a wonderful and unique relationship between this island and its caretakers, a relationship in which the island and its two caretakers have become friends. There is a gracious feeling in the woods, the paths open and cared for, the knowledge Tina and Fred have to care for it.

Grant money and prisoners built the wooden walks, but if you are injured, there are no helicopter lifts as there is nowhere to set a helicopter down. A boat used to run from Marion Island to Bassett, in the years when

the water ran high between the two. For 25 cents you could get on in the morning, spend the day on either island, and be back to your house in time for supper.

How did the island rise here? Geologically, a boulder from the Keewanaw Peninsula in the Upper Peninsula rolled down, pushed by the ice, by the glacial mo-

raine. Some paths still exist from that process, though the wooden walks were put in just approximately five years ago, following the paths of the glacial moraine. Some paths still exist from the lumber days as well, from earth-moving machines pulled by oxen to create a path and then a dirt road.

And, Tina adds, the eagles left fifty years ago, fleeing the DDT found in the fish in the harbor. Tina and Fred Tank are the caretakers of Marion and Bassett Island. Fred has an office in a bunkhouse on Marion, with internet. And Tina is a poet, writing poetry on branches and limbs which saves paper. The island is an

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The Island in 1899, showing Dick Bassett's home and out-buildings.

Picture From 1899 Newspaper Article



## Barn Quilts on the Peninsula



Old Mission Peninsula's Quilt Barn Trail is a self-guided tour of ten barns featuring quilt murals painted on wood and hung on the side of the barn. The colorful and historic quilt squares serve as an eye-catching reminder of our pioneer and agricultural heritage. Visitors can take in the beauty of our peninsula in a relaxing trek off the main roads. Just pick up a map at Peninsula Market or Old Mission Tavern and follow the trail. Pictured above top left to bottom are the Miller barn, O'Keefe barn, and the Choun barn.

—Text, Evelyn Johnson, Photos, Carl Johnson



## Doings at Dougherty



The Peter Dougherty Society has been busy. To the left is the new walking path behind the house built with the help of young people from Michigan Works. The walk is about a half a mile through a lovely wooded area.

Below are the wood planes a gift from James H. Dunkin. In a letter to the society, Mr. Dunkin says the tools came down to his family through his great aunt by marriage Anna V. Dougherty Howard, Peter Dougherty's youngest daughter. It is highly likely that Dougherty brought these tools with him when he came to Old Mission, and that he used them in building his house.

At the bottom of the page are before and almost after pictures of a new roof going on the restored outhouse. Photo credits: Path and outhouse, Nancy Warne  
Tools, Marty Klein





## Bassett Island

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island covered with poetry, burned into the wood, where it will last a hundred years or more. Solar panels collect electricity. A propane gas stove does their cooking, and the Oleson Foundation gave them a refrigerator. Fred and his brother put in a kitchen. The pair have four boys and two girls, ranging from 43 to 29 years of age, a child every three years.

I somehow, as a young child, thought that Dick Bassett, who lived on the little island, was a hermit, and in my childish way, thought that hermits were gruff old people, and that we were not to go near him because he might somehow eat us for dinner. This, of course, came from my grandfather, Lester Johnson, and I never could tell if he was telling us the truth or if he was making it up. Now, I realize, he was trying to scare us children away, to give Dick Bassett some peace!

Bassett homesteaded the little island attached to Marion Island, beginning in the 1870s or early 1880s, living there for 25 years. A 1977 edition of the Record-Eagle indicates that he was probably about 30 years old when he arrived in this part of the country, a Civil War veteran hankering after quiet and solitude. He chose Bassett Island, eventually named after him, a place that sometimes was and sometimes wasn't, there.

In periods of high water, Bassett Island is separated from Marion Island, its larger sister island. In low water times, one can walk from Bassett to Marion over dry land. Sometimes Bassett Island is 2 acres, and sometimes it is 3, depending on how much of it is underwater.

Dick Bassett was a solitary man, but he liked people. Contrary to some beliefs, he was an educated man, could hold his own in conversation and had quite a bit of dry wit, but he wouldn't talk about his past. When asked about his former life, he clammed up cold, which would make the average person start thinking in ways one wouldn't want to go.

Dick Bassett was a modest man. He caught and sold fish, grew his own vegetables, grapes and apple

trees. The original Bassett apple tree is still on Bassett Island, and it still grows apples, although the apples are a little shy and don't always come off the trees. In about 1977, Marion and Bassett Islands were a nesting place for bald eagles. According to a more recent 1977 article Dick called the female eagle of one pair "Old Hellcat" and the male "Poor Him."

Around 1890, Mr. Bassett exchanged letters with the editor of a periodical called "The Michigan Tradesmen," who wanted to publish an article on him.

The "Tradesman" editor wrote: "Dear Mr . Bassett: I send you herewith a print of engraving we made of you from a drawing executed by our designer, Ms. Cora Cady. Since the portrait represents you exactly as you are, without the frills and setting of a photographic gallery, I think it would be a good idea to publish your biography on the same plan, under the heading of "Life of Dick Bassett: Told By Himself," and I suggest you send us a sketch of your life as you would like to have it read, to appear in connection with your picture. Of course, if you do not see fit to get up a sketch in this manner, I shall be compelled to get up a sketch from such data as I can get, and unintentionally, I might say some things that would not be acceptable to you."

To this thinly veiled threat, Dick replied as follows:

"Dear sir: About 3 years ago, you wrote me up in a short thinly veiled sketch. You, of course, thought it would make me proud to see my name in print, but I was not proud, far from it, for I partly foresaw the storm that was coming, but I underestimated the gale. I refer to the newspaper storm that followed your previous short sketch. That sketch was taken up and strewn broadcast over the land by the newspapers. As it gained in quantity, it was reduced in quality.

"I was made to appear as an illicit distiller of whiskey, also a counterfeiter. Result – many people came

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From 1899 Newspaper Article



## **Bassett Island**

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here to stare at me and ask numerous and impudent questions. They included one detective who, after cross-examining me made a minute search of my house and island, going through places where he actually had to crawl on hands and knees. If I had served him well and done myself justice, I would have doused him.

"Last August, I went back to Iowa on a visit to my old army friends and I will state that I was not arrested for murder or any other bad act. One of my old comrades, who has known me some thirty years, came home with me and stayed on my island over a month. He was thoroughly pumped by some of the inquisitive people of this region about my past life; but bless the silly things, they didn't find out anything bad – consequently, they are not happy.

"Much as I regret to disappoint you, if you get 'A Life of Dick Bassett, Told By Himself,' you'll have to write it. If it is positively necessary that you print my picture in your paper, do so. I would suggest printing the following lines below it:

"The above is a perfect picture drawn by our artist of Old Dick, the Hermit. It is suspected that he is or has been closely connected with all the train robberies during the last 5 years, in Washington, Idaho, Texas and New Mexico. In 1898, Dick Bassett surprised everyone and ruined his reputation as a hermit by moving into Traverse City for the winter and setting up a retail fish store on South Union Street. That year he had a dozen men fishing for him in the bay."

The following year, Dick Bassett came close to selling the little island to a man from Chicago. Charles Thoren, Secretary of the Chicago Yacht Club, had visited the island during the previous summer and thought it would make an ideal quarters for the summer Regatta. He negotiated with Dick for its purchase, but the deal fell through because Dick couldn't establish clear title.

Shortly after this, Dick committed the ultimate betrayal: he got married and left town for good. It was rumored that the happy couple settled in California.

## **Tree Restoration**

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finish planting this year's trees.

Leo and Rebecca intend to spend most of their time in Florida, so are passing down the leadership baton to others. Not surprisingly, it takes four people to replace them. Current Co-Chairs of the Tree Project are Cal Jamieson and Bern Kroupa, with Bob Rosi and Jim Hall co-chairing the Memorial Tree subcommittee. As the holiday approaches, remember a wonderful way to memorialize a loved one is by planting a tree in their name. For \$50, a tree will be planted with an engraved plaque inscribed with a name and any other wording you choose. For further information on Memorial Trees, or to ask for a Memorial Tree order form, please contact Jim Hall at 223-8823. We also hope to have that form available soon at our web site at [www.omphistorialsociety.org](http://www.omphistorialsociety.org)

## **President's Desk**

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unselfish group we have! -- including many retired residents and some working ones who save time to serve.

Why do we do it? How do antique teacups, rotating boards, old unidentified photos, useless corn planters, boxes of used horse harnesses, a sleigh, lanterns, native American baskets, etc, encourage us to preserve them?

Is it just a nostalgic yearning for what might have been a less complicated way of life, a longing to return to our own or our grandparents youth, or a desire to not let our ancestors be forgotten? Whatever the reasons, for the most part it's fun!

—Nancy L. Warne

Mark December 3rd on your calendars for our Third Annual Holiday Party at the American Legion Post. Doors will open at 5:30 p.m. and dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. Bring a dish and your own tableware.

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