

Notes for a boat cruise, July 24, 2015 - from Douglas Heuck

Welcome everyone - and thank you for coming and supporting the Les Cheneaux Islands Community Foundation - what could be better than taking a boat ride on such a beautiful evening?

As I recognize so many of you, I'm sure that at this point you know where you - and I hope that by the end of the night after a few drinks you can still say the same. But for some others, I'll point out some landmarks.

By the way, during this voyage, you'll here the names of many families mentioned. In each of these instances, family members have made an appropriate gift (either cash or in-kind services) to your M.C. for the evening; and if you haven't but would like to, there's still time -- I'm up in the pilot house...

You are in Hessel - named for John Hessel, sawmill proprietor and the first postmaster - "Honest John" they called him. Through the years, Hessel has been many things - and now with the Culinary School, it's the regional home of fine dining. I'm looking forward to my first meal there later tonight. It's also home to many of the region's earliest settlers -- the Mertaugh's with Mertaugh's boatworks - and the Fenlon's - who were in many businesses - including lumber, the old general store.

Hessel, of course, is home to the country's biggest antique wooden boat show, started by Chuck Letts and Ken Horsburgh (with the help of many others) in 1978, which now brings thousands to this harbor to enjoy the magnificent boats, crafts and a meal. It's not surprising that we should have the biggest show - given that the great mahogany boats were essentially a Great Lakes creation. Chris Smith began by putting gasoline engines into wooden crafts, and his boats won a number of racing competitions in the teens of the 20th century. And later, with the help of Detroit venture capitalists, he launched Chris Craft in 1922. Many other companies followed.

At that time, however, there was an additional benefit to these fast boats -- Hessel, including many of its merchants and boat drivers, was a significant player during the days of prohibition. When the U.S. Congress passed the Volstead Act and took away the country's freedom to drink alcohol, places all along the Canadian border accepted Canadian Whiskey - and Hessel was one of many major spots for its distribution into the U.S.

That long narrow island to the right is Haven Island (long known as Fenlon's Island). And to the right and behind it, Goat Island. And beyond, the West Entrance - framed on the left by Coats' point - named after a great fisherman - Captain Coats - and on the right, Point Brulee - named after the Huron Indian interpreter - Etienne Brule - better known for inventing Creme Brulee - not really.

Hessel island dwellers are the landed gentry - preferring the wide open spaces, neighbors only at a great distance - and braving the surf and spray of Hessel Bay and Wilderness Bay when they get up on their heels.

These 36 islands were carved by glaciers during the last ice age - which reached its peak in terms of geographic coverage 22,000 years ago and finally receded some 12,000 years ago. As they receded, the glaciers formed the islands and gouged the channels in their Northwest to Southeast pattern - and created this wonderful anomaly -- Les Cheneaux, which of course means the channels.

Coming out from Marquette Island to the right is Cube Point, from an early Indian of that name. It's home to the Brown family - still referred to by many as the first family of the upper peninsula for the leadership of Prentiss Brown - U.S. Senator - Chairman of Detroit Edison Company and later, In 1951, chairman of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. Brown oversaw construction of the great Mackinac bridge, which opened in November 1957. The first concept of a bridge across the straights, however, goes all the way back to the 1880s. Not much happened, though. Then in 1920, the state highway commissioner proposed a floating tunnel.... Again, no go.

In 1923 ferry service began - and by 1947, the car ferry was so popular that cars queued up in Mackinaw City - often didn't reach St. Ignace for hours and hours. Finally, in the 1950s, a contract was awarded to the American Bridge division of U.S. Steel to build the bridge, ushering in a new heyday for the Les Cheneaux. But when the bridge opened in 1957, it also rang the death knell for the islands formerly booming hotel business as people built more of their own homes.

History credits Jean Nicolet as being the first white man to pass through these islands - in 1634. The lieutenant

of Champlain was escorted by seven Huron Indians - in birchbark canoes - part of a quest to find a short route to China and Asia. In 1639, father Claude Allouez was the first Jesuit to visit the islands. Camping here Nov. 4 1639, he wrote: "On the 5th, upon waking, we found ourselves covered with snow and the surface of the canoe coated with ice. We embarked with difficulty - our bare feet in the water."

Father Marquette first came here in 1671 - drawing the first maps of the islands. The biggest island of course is named for him. It should be mentioned that the missionaries were generally born in Europe, very educated - and unaccustomed to a life of hardship. They came here - and often died a martyr's death to try to convert the Indians. They endured a huge range of hardships, as anyone who has seen the film "Black Robe" will remember.

Another early group were the French Canadians - who often led or were members of these expeditions -- These fur traders had the reputation of being courageous and merry, and providing lively companionship - and they loved the freedom of a life lived in nature.

With the earliest white explorers - and until 1842, fur trading dominated the region - carried on in birchbark canoes and bateau - a shallow draft, flat bottomed boat. During that trade, the islands were a natural shelter for the men who made the trip between Mackinac and the Saint Mary's river up to the falls of Sault Ste. Marie - at a time when this area was part of New France.

IN 1679, the first sailing vessel in the great lakes was the Griffon - led by LaSalle, after whom the Les Cheneaux's second biggest island is named - The Griffon nearly sank in a storm while passing Les Cheneaux. Everyone prayed and prepared to death - except the pilot, whom they could never get to pray - and who cursed LaSalle for bringing him to this lake where he would die - after so many successful years navigating the oceans. (As perhaps you guessed, they didn't die.)

The First permanent white settler was Father Andrew Piret - a Catholic Priest - in 1850. But prior to 1880, there were few white settlers, outside William Patrick, and the fishermen and lumberman and other names we still recognize: Coryell, Fenlon, Hamel, Hessel, Pollard, Mertaugh and Hodeck - among many others. Detroit lawyer Henry Wisner is credited as being the first summer resident - he came here with an Indian guide to fish. And the transition to a place of summer homes happened in a burst - from the 1890s on.

Much of the land you see to the right - is part of the Aldo Leopold Nature Preserve - 1700 acres on Marquette Island - through the work of the Little Traverse Conservancy, the Nature Conservancy and donors. It's named for Leopold who spent his summers on Marquette in the Les Cheneaux Club and became a noted naturalist and writer. In 1933, he published the first textbook on wildlife management.

To the left, is St. Ledger's Island - named after Frenchman Michael St. Ledger - who had a cabin where the Les Cheneaux Club later would be, essentially squatting on Indian land, with their permission. He was a fisherman who had a small fishing business - patrons were the founders of the Les Cheneaux Club. In my family, the fishing hole there has always been known as the \$10 hole - because my great uncle paid the princely sum of \$10 to be rowed there by a guide. This was also the favorite spot of Dick Powell, known nationally as the creator of Hogan's Heroes and long-term head of the Screenwriters Guild in LA - but his reputation here was built on something much more solid - his fishing prowess - and at that spot, he caught the biggest pike of his life - a 20 pounder.

Now I'd like to welcome RB Smith, who will talk about the Les Cheneaux Club

On the left is Patrick's landing - which was literally the landing where people got off the steamers from Mackinac in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Early pioneer William Patrick, also owned the first hotel - the Pennsylvania House, formerly on what is now the golf course. Before it was Patrick's Landing, however, the land was once an Indian cemetery - where the graves, which faced west - had roofs made of bark. These gabled roofs were 1-2 feet high and open at the gables. The roofs protected the dead from storms - and the openings allowed the spirit to depart when that time came toward the pacific ocean and the happy hunting grounds. More on the Indians on the way back.

But in the hey day of Patrick's landing, there were few hotels, and most of the area was taken up by lumbering. Men worked lumber in the winter and often as fishing guides in the summer. Lumberjacks would stand astride mighty logs, fall into the cold water, and climb right back up and keep working. Colds were unknown in the lumber camps, and the reputation of a germ-free environment - with great fishing - was the bait that attracted the area's

first summer residents.

Up ahead the picturesque Dollar Island- Sometimes people think it's name comes from being about the bigger size of a silver dollar - but the fact is that it was first purchased at government sale at that price.

Up ahead is Muskellunge Bay - named surprisingly, for the quantity and size of the great muskies caught there.

Around Pleasant Point to the right is the Les Cheneaux yacht club - 75 years old this summer - started by Dr. Ed Wagner, a famous pediatrician of Cincinnati Row and a group of his friends by the names of Benedict, Haffner, Altmaier, Kaufmann, Noyes, Horsburgh, Mertaugh and my grandfather Robert Heuck - all families that still come here.

The club is best known for its Ensign fleet, the biggest in the nation - with the best sailors too - most noteworthy many time national champion Tom LaBelle. We were so grateful to the Labelles several years ago, when they chaired the race committee - taking themselves out of contention and giving others the hope of winning some hardware. I understand Fleet 31 is preparing to make them a permanent race committee offer. Credit for getting this fleet started goes to the late Ken Horsburgh and who brought the first ensign to the area - and to my late father Ken Heuck. Ken called Dad and said, "Hey Ken, I've got a boat I think would be great for Les Cheneaux," and Dad who had a sideline business selling yachts, started bring ensigns to the area. Each summer, we'd tow a new ensign up, sail it for several weeks until a friend bought it. This went on for a number of years and that's how the first 10-15 ensigns got here and how the fleet grew. The momentum ultimately built on itself, and now, Fleet 31 has nearly 70 boats, and we have some of the best one-design racing in the country.

To the left we have Woodland park, the Park Avenue of the Les Cheneaux. This residential association was developed by Pittsburgh industrialist O.M. Reif - and Reif's Point up ahead is where he lived - and where until recently, we had our first residential real estate listing of over \$2 million.

Across the Bay is Little LaSalle Island - home of the Altmaier/Dunn and Benedict Clans - and once a young fellow named Bill McEdwards - better known by his Hollywood name - Blake Edwards. In the late '60s, the area was aflame with the news that Edwards -known for directing the Pink Panther -- and his wife - the great singer and actress - Julie Andrews would visit. Between Little LaSalle and Big LaSalle is Boselys Channel - now navigable all the way to the big lake again - when just three summers ago the two islands were joined. Then we have Urie Bay - long time home of pioneer Charlie Urie - who had a farm there.

The thrill last week was when a government C-130 Transport Plane was flying around here about 150 feet above the water. The huge plane created quite a stir. Some thought - Oh, how beautiful! To others, Big Brother was finally onto them. As the plane seemed to be diving right onto my boat, I assumed they saw my open container aboard and were going to bomb me for it. But it turns out, it was just looking for a distress beacon - probably from an islander who'd lost Internet connection.

Over to the left, is Melcher's Point - Long the home of Milo Melcher, a pianist who married an heiress from the Stroh brewing family. Milo and Rose Stroh Melcher built a cottage that stood for about a century on Melcher's Point in Melcher's Bay - now home to the Ashworths.

Before the Melchers, tourism was slow in Les Cheneaux. But in 1896, the Melcher's completed the Islington Hotel - really the magnificent Queen of all the Les Cheneaux Hotels - and the center of social life for the next 50 years.

My great grandparents became guests the second year and after that year, they rented the Melcher's cottage for the next nine years, and during that time, my great grandfather Hubert Heuck had a rule: if anyone visited the area who was from Cincinnati, he would either put them up or, at a minimum, treat them to a lunch or dinner. This policy sowed the seeds for Cincinnati Row. In 1906, Hubert and Emma Heuck decided to build their own place. At that time, literally everywhere was available, and their children were aflame with the possibilities, each having their favorite spots in mind - Sand Cove, where the Altmaiers later built, Bosely Channel, and so on. When my great grandfather announced he would build on what Rose Point, his sons said "What is Rose Point?" When he pointed it out to them - at what is now the head of Cincinnati Row - the children couldn't believe it. Why there of all places? His rationale was that from there, he could row to town and to the Islington for his regular poker game.

In the early '20s - after World War I had ended, Cincinnati row got going. Our place was finished for the 1908

season. Aunt Tena, my grandfather's half sister, built hers in 1914. Aunt Tena's place was originally up on the hill, but one year she had it put on rollers and moved down to surprise her house party guests. Apparently no one noticed, and as the story goes "She got so mad she sold the place." Since then it has been home to the Windisch/Bentley family.

My grandfather and his two brothers, Walter and Carl Hubert, decided it would be best if they each had their own places. So Granddad purchased their shares in what we call "The Big Cottage," Walter built the cottage next door, which is now the Ecker cottage, and Carl Hubert purchased the hunting lodge further down the row, which is now owned by Roger Heuck and his sister Alice Jean Heuck Goldfarb.

By 1921, a bunch of Cincinnati friends had visited - and many rented cottages across the marsh - at the Hopkins cottages - And in 1922, they bought lots and Cincinnati Row with its great boathouses and cottages took shape, with the Wagners (Terrills now), Berghausens, Brumleves, Haffners and Maeschers (Hessers and Hassans) being among those early families who still own along the row, almost 100 years later.

On the other side of the channel were two marinas -- Viking and Tassier's. Leo Tassier had a great reputation with motors and tended many of the fine wooden boats arriving as the 20th Century gathered steam.

Viking Boat Harbor traces its roots to Louis Folmer, who started the marina in 1915, calling it "The Rendezvous" -- But since 1947, when George and Dee Honilla bought it, it has been Viking. George ran it for years, then so did his son Wayne - a stalwart citizen in so many ways until his death about 10 years ago. Now Wayne's son Stephen runs Viking, carrying on the tradition of dependability and civic leadership.

On the left - is the Boatbuilding School - which had a fundraiser last night and is reviving the great skills of building and refurbishing the region's beautiful wooden boats - to great acclaim.

What can we say about Cedarville Harbor? For the past two decades, we could say "It's seen better days" - Once, a teeming waterfront - and way back - in the 1890s -- a place which, though generally civil - women were warned to stay away from on Saturday nights as the lumbermen and Indians blew off steam. Key institutions for the early and mid parts of the 20th century were Hossack's general store - and The Bon Air.

In the past 40 years, we've seen the dramatic success of Flotation Docking Systems conceived and built by Dan Carmichael and now run by his son Cody - with customers all over the great lakes. And this year, Dan purchased and cleared the sad, old Bon Air site and has turned it into attractive green space - We're all hoping he starts serving Jersey Muds there soon.

And - there's now an ambitious plan to revive the waterfront - with a government grant that requires a local match, which will hopefully regain some of the boat traffic -- the great cruisers and sailboats which used to come through Cedarville after the Port Huron and Chicago races on their way to the North Channel.

Over to the left, you can still make out the remnants of the old lumber mill dock, formerly owned by the Hodeck's - of Hodeck st. He also built the general store - and Hodeck House - (also known as The Cedar Inn)

Up ahead, you can see Hill Island - peeking out - named for Mason Hill. And to the right of it is Island No. 8 - named in the 1840s, when surveyors apparently ran out of names. Both islands are connected to the mainland by a bridge - giving them tremendous convenience, year-round capabilities, and making them the envy of us grocery-lugging island dwellers.

On the right is Dave and Linda Parlan's place - one of the most beautiful homes in the islands - with the commanding view east of Government Bay. This was summer base of operations for a reputed associate of Al Capone, who according to local lore kept watch over bootlegging operations from that perch.

Govt. Bay is unlike most of the other bays in that it has good deep water. In the 1890s - three or four masted ships would come through govt. bay and load up on hay - a big export at that time.

Up ahead between Government Island and LaSalle Island is McGulpin's Channel - navigable until half way through the last century, when a big Sandbar formed on the outer end. It was long the spot for disembarking for the beautiful walk to Bass Cove Lake. Since the '20s and '30s - and perhaps before - the land along McGulpins was

private property - and walking through to Bass Cove Lake often has been discouraged. No time however, was it discouraged more than during the '30s when there was a girls' camp there. The woman who ran that camp for some reason didn't like the presence of summer boys snooping around - and found a very effective way of getting rid of them - as the late Dr. Fred Haffner recalled - when he was running away and was shot in the rear end by a shotgun load of rock salt. When I was a kid, the place was reputed to be home to "The Hatchet Lady" which I'm sure was unwarranted - but enhanced many a campfire story.

Govt. Island - formerly known as Island number 6 - was owned and used by the U.S. gov't. in making lighthouses - there was a quarry on the island and at the northern end, you might still be able to see a few of the posts of the great dock, which the freighters would use. The Spectacle Reef Lighthouse was built from rock from this island.

Up ahead as we begin our turn back is Coryell island - named for early homesteader W.H. Coryell - and home to many of the island's most beautiful homes - reached from Lakeside Landing, where the Lakeside Hotel once stood.

Scammon's Harbor - between Boot, Coryell and Govt - is named for Captain Scammon who sought shelter for his ship there during a storm in 1860.

Now I'll give you a much needed break from me.

Straight ahead is Taylor Lumber - built and maintained by the Taylor family for generations -- The sawdust from the mill - has helped to build what was essentially marshland - into land upon which houses and roads have been built.

Beyond that, the home of Helen Shoberg, longtime columnist for the Weekly Wave and St. Ignace News - and a talented painter. For many decades, the site was the home of Shoberg Resort - run by her husband Con Shoberg, one of the all-around great year-round residents of the 20th Century. Con's father was famed Islington Hotel fishing guide and Swedish immigrant Victor Shoberg, who fished well into his 90s and could often be seen in his Truscott launch and wide-brimmed hat - with multiple poles over the side of the boat.

Up ahead we'll round Islington Point -- which for you fisherman, is historically a place where big muskies lurk. The late Sandy Wells ran the Islington for many years - ultimately closing it and tearing it down in, as I recall, 1959. It was truly the end of a magnificent era - and many cottages have, as prized possessions - furniture from the Islington. And Milo and Rose Melcher's descendants - the Wells family - still live on the point.

Over to the left is the home of Roger Heuck, known to many for his outstanding Plein Air paintings of the area and for the many workshops he's led in the last 20 years.

Over at the left, beyond the end of Cincinnati Row - you can make out up on the hill - where the old Elliot House hotel was, another of the hotels that faded with the opening of the Mackinac Bridge.

Around to the right - beyond Melcher's point is Shepherd's Bay - named for the Shepherd Family - one of the earliest up here - and site of their farm once upon a time - It's still owned by the family - the Haines family - Jim and Marnie - whose late mother was Isobel Shepherd Haines.

This water we're going through incidentally, was home just three summer's ago to an impenetrable mass of Eurasian milfoil. Many efforts have been tried to reduce eradicate this weed - with some success - but we've mainly been spared by the rising lake levels - and colder water of the last two years - which haven't allowed the sun to penetrate as deep and the weeds to grow as quickly - this remains a problem we'll likely see if and when water levels drop again.

Up ahead, again, is Woodland Park - There are so many beautiful homes in Woodland Park - And one of them, owned by Chris and Wendy Bentley will be featured next summer in Coastal Living Magazine -

As we round Reif's point, I'll mention that one November Day three of four years ago, I saw 13 bald eagles on that point - old and young devouring a couple of huge fish - and I didn't know until then, that the eagles migrate through here every year on their way South.

Finally, in the last part of our voyage, I'd like to pass along some information about the people who preceded all of

the cottagers, Jesuits and French Canadians - The Indians.

It was in these waters, according to Indian legend, that an Indian named Manabozho - the prototype for Longfellow's Hiawatha - first conceived and built fishing nets after pondering the work of the spider. Much of what Longfellow wrote in the Song of Hiawatha, came from an outstanding written history and chronicling of the local Chippewa/Ojibwa legends and traditions by Henry Schoolcraft, who was the Indian agent at Sault Ste. Marie and Mackinac from 1822 - 41.

Before the White man came to the Straights, the vast territory from Hudson Bay down to the Ohio River - and stretching 1,000 miles east to west - was home of the Algonquian speaking tribes, the most powerful of which was the Chippewa/Ojibwa, which had successful battles even against the Sioux in the west - so far did their lands stretch. Some time, long ago, the Hurons and Pottawatamies split off forming separate tribes, but they still had a loose confederation of the "Three Fires" and shared the common enemy of the Iroquois. The great eastern Confederation of the Iroquois - known for their eloquence and their fighting - were ultimately defeated by the Chippewa at Point Iroquois on Lake Superior - near the Soo.

The most famous local Indian was Shabwaywa - or Shabway as he was known locally. The local chief travelled to Washington D.C. to take part of the Treaty of 1836, in which the Indians gave up much of Michigan. Shabway, however, fought to retain the Les Cheneaux and specifically Marquette Island - which succeeded for a time.

Shabway was Born in 1770 - he was over 100 when he died in 1872 in his cabin on Marquette, on the present grounds of the Les Cheneaux club. His name meant "Echoes from a distance" and he was hereditary chief from the Saint Mary's to the Pine Rivers. He was greatly hospitable to white travellers - who stayed in his log cabin, and he told stories in front of a great fireplace. He was a gifted teller of Indian stories, legends and traditions and probably contributed greatly to Schoolcraft's history - and Longfellow's Hiawatha. What remained of his house was called "The Old Chimney" -- from which the old Chimney point, on the left, derives its name.

Up ahead on Marquette was an Indian Village, where islanders would go to buy Indian hand crafts. And the Indians would also sail their two-masted boats - with red sails - and stop at cottages to sell blueberries and other goods. They would drop their sails - and paddle in - which is what gave rise to the term, "Indian landing" which some of you may recall.

And now -- I'd like to thank Mr. Smith and for his help - and to thank you all for the opportunity to be your guide - to give me an opportunity to read up on my history - and for your support of the Les Cheneaux Islands Community Foundation. Enjoy the rest of the cruise.