

History of Kelleys Island, Erie County, OH

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Kelleys Island

Kelleys Island, originally known as Cunningham's Island, is situated a little to the west of north of Sandusky, in latitude $41^{\circ} 35'$ north, and longitude $82^{\circ} 42'$ west from Greenwich. It was first thought to belong to the fire lands, which were to be bounded on the north by the territorial line, which was also the boundary between Canada and the United States, and should include all the islands of Lake Erie lying east of the west line of the Western Reserve. After a long and bitter contest the matter was compromised in such a way that this island remained a part of the Reserve, but was not to be considered a part of the Firelands. The earliest official record of what is known as Kelleys Island was when Township No. 5 was drawn, in the division among themselves. of the Connecticut Land Company's purchase, which covered the whole of the Reserve, and was divided by lot among them. When a township of lesser value was drawn something else was thrown in, and thus when Township No. 5 was drawn Cunningham's Island, thought to be of little value, was added and divided among the thirteen owners.

Of the history prior to this time there are relics and traces of Indian life that show that different tribes lived here for a time, and were then driven off and banished. Near the residence of Mr. Addison Kelley were found arrow heads, broken pipes, implements and other articles of rude workmanship that point to a time when a large village existed on the spot. On the Huntington farm were still to be found remains of a circular earthwork which must have enclosed seven acres of land. It would be difficult to find a locality so full of prehistoric interest as this of Kelleys Island, and the inhabitants are cordial in assisting the investigator. Perhaps the greatest object of interest is "Inscription Rock," on the south shore of the island in Lake Erie, just east of the steamboat landing, which is thus described by Colonel Eastman, who copied the hieroglyphics for the government work:

"This rock is 32 ft. by 21 ft. and is part of the same stratification as the Island, from which it has been separated by lakes action. The top presents a smooth and polished surface, like all the limestone of this quarter when the soil is removed, suggesting the idea that this polish is due to glacial attrition. Upon this the peculiar inscription is cut. The figures and devices are deeply cut in the rock and yet it presents all its smoothness of surface as if they had been exposed to the polishing or wearing influence of water; yet this influence if from water could not

have been rapid as the surface of the water is 11 ft. below the rock surface, its base having only a few inches of water around it. The sculpture is by far the most expensive, well sculptured and well preserved inscription of the antiquarian period ever found in America. It is in the picturgraphic character of the nation, and its leading symbols are easily interpreted. The human figures, the pipes, the smoking groups, the presents and other figures denote tribes, treaties, crimes, turmoils, which tell a story of thrilling interest in which the white man or European plays a part. The whole inscription is manifestly one connected with the occupation of the shores of this lake by the Eries; of the coming of the Wyandotts; of the final triumphs of the Iroquois, and the flight of the people who gave their name to the lake."

There are several other rocks that tell of the rude skill of these natives; many of them covered with saucer like depressions, worn there by the process of manufacturing stone hatchets or flesh knives, of which great numbers have been found. In the year 1851 drawings of the inscriptions of the large rock were made by Colonel Eastman, United States Army, who was detailed by the government to examine them. Copies of them were sent to Shimgcank, a learned Indian, who was well versed in pictography, by whom they were deciphered and translated; but the translation is too long for this work.

This interpreter decided that they related to affairs of which he knew nothing, but that belong to the time after the whites had become acquainted with the Indians of Lake Erie. One of the strongest proofs of this was a symbol of a hat which appeared three times; but that they had not yet seen firearms he thought conclusive from the fact that there were no representations of any to be seen. When it is remembered that the general opinion is that the Iroquois first received guns from the Dutch at Albany, in 1614, and that the Lake Indians did not receive them from the French until some years later, it is easily seen that the date of these inscriptions cannot be earlier than 1625. From that time until the nineteenth century the history of the island is a blank.

In 1808 a Frenchman by the name of Cunningham settled upon the island, and for a quarter of a century after it was known by his name. He traded with the Indians, buying from them maple sugar, skins, etc., and giving them in exchange blankets, trinkets, and probably whiskey, which has always been a regular article of trade with savages. He built a rude cabin and lived here until 1812. His fate is uncertain, but it is generally supposed that he left because of the opening of the war, and was killed in some skirmish with Indians and British. During the war General Harrison kept a guard stationed at the west point of the island, for the purpose of watching the movements of the enemy on the lake. The guards' camp occupied a clearing made by a Frenchman, whose name was Bebo, in 1810. He had come with a man named Poschile, and each made a clearing. That of Bebo was a little to the north of Carpenter's maple grove. Poschile's was near the site of Kelleys upper wharf.

Commodore Perry prepared for the Battle of Lake Erie in the little harbor on the south side of the island. Here he anchored his fleet, and here he received on board

thirty six Ohio, Pennsylvania and Kentucky volunteers from Harrison's army; and here he was visited by General Harrison and his aides, Cass and McArthur, to talk over and plan the coming battles, which were destined to close the war.

From 1812 to 1818 it is not known that there were any white settlers on Kelleys Island. During the latter year a man named Killam, with his family and one or two men, came here and built a cabin and remained until 1820. It was at this time that the first steamboat was built on the lake, and called the Walk-on-the-Water. A sailboat also made short trips between Sandusky and the island to meet the steamboat, which could not go to Sandusky every trip, and received her passengers from Venice and Sandusky in this way. The Walk-on-the-Water was wrecked October 19, 1820. During those two years Killam was employed to supply the fuel for the boat, and this had to be cut and boated out to the steamboat. It was red cedar, which was very abundant in this locality. After the wrecking of the Walk-on-the Water, this business was stopped, and Killam left the island in 1820. From that time until 1826 there were no permanent residents here. About that time a couple of men employed by Killam to get out wood continued their work from time to time, and one of them is connected with the history of the island from the Point, which bears his name. Barnum's Point is on the east end of the island, and carries with it the memory of these times, when these two men became enemies, and Barnum killed Grunmet, who was preparing to shoot him. It was decided that the act was done in self defense, and Barnum moved away from this section of the country.

In 1826 Elisha Ellis and Peter Shook obtained contracts for two pieces of land, and Ellis proceeded to build a house on his into which his wife and himself moved.

Shook went away and never returned, and in 1828 Henry Ellithorpe went there to begin stock raising. During the winter of 18289 the only inhabitants of this township were Mr. and Mrs. Ellis, Mr. Ellithorpe and Frank Saunders, who worked for Ellis. In December, 1830, Henry Ellithorpe was married in Sandusky to Elizabeth Neal, and took her home on the ice, taking along six head of cattle. He built a house of cedar on the bank of the lake, and here was born October 6, 1832, the first white child, a son, and named George Ellithorpe.

Of the 2,888 acres comprising this island, only six acres were cleared in 1833, when Datus Kelley and his brother Irad visited it with a view to purchasing land and going into the cedar business. Before this, however, Captain Ransom, of Sandusky, and Burr Higgins had had an interview with the agents of the principal owners, but the purchase was not effected. The first purchase of lands was effected on the 20th day of August, 1833, and consisted of a contract made by the attorney of John A. and Mary Rockwell, and Alfred E. Perkins, for 1,444 92-100 acres, or almost one-half the total area of the island. For this they paid \$2,167.35, or \$1.50 an acre. Other purchases followed, and in the autumn of that year a double log house was built for a boarding house. During the following winter the wood dock was commenced, and by the next spring was sufficiently near finished to afford a landing to steamboats, and the business of wooding was begun.

Up to the year 1837 this had been a part of the Township of Danbury, and was included in Huron County. That year, however, a change was made, and Erie County was created and Kelleys Island was set off as a part of it. The Legislature in 1840 enacted a law that "all that tract known as Cunningham's Island, situated on the south side of Lake Erie, be constituted a township to be known as Kelleys Island."

On the 6th of March, 1840, was passed an act creating the County of Ottawa, which should include within its boundaries the new island townships of Kelleys Island and Van Rensselaer. The first election for organization as a township was in April, 1840. There were fifteen votes polled, and in May an election was held for county offices.

As the population increased and its business was entirely with Sandusky, its connection with Ottawa County became very irksome, and a determination was formed to effect a separation and be reinstated in Erie County. In February, 1845, the Legislature passed a law to that effect, so that in the short space of seven years Kelleys Island formed a part of two townships and four counties, and of the four children of Mr. Addison Kelley, born in the same house, no two were natives of the same township or county.

When Datus and Irad Kelley had purchased the island they found several squatters with a little improvement here and there. These they proceeded to buy off, and generally did so with little or no trouble. There was one man, however, not so readily disposed. He claimed to have purchased his tract and refused to give it up without being forced to do so by law. The result, though expensive, and costing, it is said, as much as the purchase of the island, was beneficial in many ways, for it proved that the Kelleys titles could not be set aside.

After Datus Kelley built the docks he turned his attention to the matter of education and built a schoolhouse. This was done entirely at his own and his brother's expense. It was the first frame building ever erected on the island, and has since been used as a copper and blacksmith shop.

Mr. Kelley was a natural reformer. He believed that no place could grow, or community prosper, without a basis of substantial qualities; and these were, in his estimation, education, frugality, and temperance. Having provided a schoolhouse he next proceeded to offer a reward or bonus to his men, in addition to their regular pay, for dispensing with intoxicants. Various successful men have dated the beginning of their success to the encouragement afforded them at that time by the precepts and example of Mr. Kelley.

At this time Mr. Kelley had not moved here, but spent half of every year on the island. In 1836 he resolved to make his permanent residence on the island, and moved his family into a small log house, which was afterward the site of George Kelley's house. In 1838 he built a frame house, where he resided until he built the old part of what was known as the Island House. At this time there were twelve

families on the island, which, with the men who boarded in them, constituted the entire population of Kelleys Island sixty six years ago.

Quarrying stone, getting out cedar posts, chopping steamboat wood, etc., was the business carried on at that time. All the money made heretofore had been made by stone or cedar, but after 1836 steamboat wood formed the largest item of trade. There could be no farming carried on until the land was cleared, hence it became necessary to offer such inducements that the steamboats would stop for wood. This effected twos things, clearing the land and opening communication with the ports on the lake. Not only was Mr. Kelley the pioneer of education and civilization on the island, but his son, Addison Kelley, furnished the model for the first boat that was built here. It was not like other boats, but was intended to weather the storms of all seasons. It was launched early in 1839 and named Number One. She proved herself worthy of her title when she outlived the worst gale ever known here, in which the schooner Helen Mar was lost with all on board. This boat was so constructed as to right herself in all positions. Her keel was an oak plank, seventeen inches in depth and four inches thick, with an iron shoe on the bottom of it that weighed nearly a ton.

The growth of Kelleys Island population has been very rapid. No sooner had the Kelleys become its owners than they commenced a series of improvements, and proceeded to put their lands in the market at fair prices. The earliest purchasers directly from D. and J. Kelley were Addison Kelley, John Titus, James Hamilton, Julius Kelley, Horace Kelley, J. E. Woodford, G. C. Huntington, Patrick Martin, Bernard McGettigan, S. S. Dwelle and James Estes. A stone building with lot donated and built by Datus and Sarah Kelley is open to public services of all profitable kinds. There are four churches, each of which supports its own minister and has regular services. The most prominent building is the Island House, a fine summer hotel built in 1874, and destroyed by fire in 1877, and subsequently rebuilt. It was originally the property of Addison Kelley, who sold it to Colby, Hickox and Matson, of Mansfield. It afterward became the property of Jacob Rush. It is 224 feet by 40, three stories high, with grounds elegantly laid out, and all the accessories of a delightful summer resort.

The history of Kelleys Island requires a special mention of the different steamboats that have helped in her march toward civilization. From 1839 the main reliance was Number One, until, after a few years of hard and faithful service it was pronounced unseaworthy, and plans were formed to build a successor. The possibility of using steam was discussed, but no one thought it could be done. While the decision was not yet made, the matter was decided in a most unexpected manner in 1846. In the spring of that year Mr. Addison Kelley had occasion to go to Venice on Number One. The vessel was in a poor condition, and the weather stormy. He concluded it was not safe to return until the storm abated, and in the evening strolled into the office of H. N. Fish, and while discussing the limited means of communication between the island and the outer world, Mr. Fish suggested that a small steamboat might be built, by which they could come and go as they chose. Mr. Kelley saw the advantage of this, but stated that they were not able to do it; whereupon Mr. Fish promised them a liberal sum as a loan, to be

paid for in transportation, and also promised the business of carrying the wheat from Fremont, if they would build a boat of sufficient capacity. On Mr. Kelley's return home he laid the matter before Mr. D. Kelley, who would have to be the principal stockholder. He took hold of the matter at once, and in less than one week from the time of its first suggestion the steamboat known as the Islander was under construction. She was a decided success, and did her work well for years, but was at length superseded by the Island Queen in 1853. She was commanded by Captain Orr, and sold in 1866. When she was built she was thought to be too large for the service, but eventually proved too small. She was finally captured by the Confederates and sunk in 1864. She was recovered in a few days, comparatively uninjured, and two years later her owners and some others formed a company and purchased the steamer Evening Star. The Star was a new boat of 340 tons, with a beautiful model low pressure beam engine, and cost \$45,000, with an additional \$1,000 for fitting her up. Her speed was fine, and her carrying capacity unequaled at that time, often carrying on an excursion 1,200 passengers. Her captains were successively Captain Magle, Kirby and Brown. She was sold in 1872 with the Raindeer, and since that time the islanders have owned no steamboats.

The following table of statistics of 1863 shows the still primitive condition of the island at that time:

Domestic imports, nothing whatever except building materials and family supplies.

Foreign imports, none.

Exports coastwise:

Red cedar,	714 cords	\$ 4,291
Limestone,	390 cords	780
Steamboat wood,	3,248 cords	4,102
Corn, wheat and pork		2,000
Total		\$11,083

Steamboats and vessels:

One steamboat,	80 tons	\$ 5,000
One sail-boat	150	

Population, 1849, 180. Population, 1863, 600.

Not only did Mr. D. Kelley build the first schoolhouse, give the first impetus toward thrift, temperance and success on the island, but he started grape growing, which has since become such an important industry here and elsewhere. In the year 1846 the value of grapes sold by D. Kelley did not exceed \$5. In 1861 the value of the grape crop was \$51,080, from 128 acres. This does not give a fair average per acre, as many of the vines were bearing for the first time. The first vine was only set out in 1842 by Mr. Kelley, who had brought cuttings from his old home in Rockport. In 1844 the first Catawbas were planted from cuttings obtained from Judge Ely, of Elyria. Mr. Carpenter bought a farm on the west end of the island, and commenced setting out vines until in two or three years he had more vines than any of the older settlers. There was no thought at this time of making the grapes into wine, for the thought had been advanced and believed that no wine could be made from these grapes that would keep. The demand for grapes steadily increased, and in 1855 it was much easier to sell them at 10 cents a pound than it had been nine years before at five.

As late as 1854 there was comparatively a small amount of land put into grapes, and this was done by old settlers. The first move in the direction of increasing the number of producers was made in that year, when some intelligent Germans who had come from the wine districts of the old world found employment on the island. They began to see the possibilities of the future, and desired to buy land for grape culture. Five acres were bought from Mr. Addison Kelley for \$50 an acre, and when he was remonstrated with on the exorbitant price at which he valued his land he replied that he should sell the next higher, and would only sell five acres to the same individual. Within a few days he sold five acres for \$60 an acre, and from that to \$75, \$100 and \$125 was quickly reached. The grape fever became more wide spread, and as yet there were no checks to the progress of the business, for rot, late frosts and other evils were unknown for eighteen years. In 1862, after a successful beginning, the rot appeared for the first time.

The Kelleys Island and Sandusky Cable Completed

On the afternoon of July 8, 1875, the main shore land line of the Kelleys Island and Sandusky Cable Company was attached to an instrument in the Atlantic & Pacific Telegraph office in this city and the click of the instrument soon announced that the cable was in working order. Mayor Daniel sent the following message to the island:

"Sandusky, July 8, 1875.

"To THE CITIZENS OF KELLEY ISLAND:

"Allow me to congratulate you upon your enterprise in opening direct communication between Kelley s Island and Sandusky by successfully laying a submarine cable in Lake Erie by which we shall be able to be more closely

connected, and as the cable reaches from one point to the other without a stop, thereby binding the two together, may it also bring the people of the island and Sandusky into closer relations and make them if possible, still more friendly in the future than they have been in the past.

"Yours respectfully,
"GEO. DANIEL, Mayor."

The following reply was then received from Mr. Erastus Huntington of Kelleys Island who is secretary and treasurer of the company:

"Kelleys Island, July 8.

"GEO. DANIEL. Mayor of Sandusky:

"Your congratulatory dispatch to the citizens of Kelleys Island is received. In behalf of our citizens allow me to thank you for your kind wishes, and, as the people of Sandusky united with us in buying and laying our cable, so may we always be united as one in the future, and may our interests be united in a bond of union as perfect as our cable.

"KRASTUS HUNTINGTON,
"Sec. and Treas., K. I. & S. C. Co."

Norman Kelley used to say that Kelleys Island was originally inhabited by rattlesnakes, that the hogs came and ate the rattlesnakes, then the Irish came and ate the hogs, then the Germans came and drove out the Irish. It is true that all that is left of the Kelleys on the island is the name they gave it. In the lapse of time the island has developed into a summer resort with an increasing patronage and has developed a limestone business of large proportions. Its population has increased to 750 and it is one of the most beautiful spots in Lake Erie.

FRED SCHARDT

One of the oldest families in Kelleys Island is the Schardt family. Fred Schardt was born on January 15, 1860. His father was Adam Schardt, and Amelia Dischinger Schardt was his mother. His father was a shoemaker by trade and left Germany in 1849. Having been one of those patriots who failed in attempting to establish a republic against the Prussians, in 1861, he not only paid a substitute three hundred dollars to take his place, but shortly on account of the sympathy of the English for the South, he volunteered and joined the army himself and fought with a creditable army record.

Fred Schardt spent his youth in helping his father in the wine business. What education he had, he obtained at the Kelleys Island schools. The first two years of his schooling were spent in the public schools of Kelleys Island. At the end of those two years, a Prussian professor came to the island and induced German

residents to back him up in his venture of starting a school, the teaching being entirely in the Germany language. In this school his father placed Fred for two years, at the end of which time he had practically forgotten all that he knew of the English language. So he was sent back to the public schools where he remained until he passed the sixth grade.

He has always been very fond of athletics. First skating, baseball. then hunting and trapshooting; and in his later years, skating and dancing.

He has always been in the wine and grape vineyard business until he was put out of the wine business by California wine companies' competition.

He is a Republican and a member of the Elk and Moose secret societies. His father; Adam Schardt, bought Addison Kelly's old residence and lived there until Fred was seventeen years old. The old house was then torn down and a hotel built - The Schardt House.

REV. ERNEST KOEHNE

Rev. Ernest Koehne was born April 5, 1860, at Oldenburg, Germany. His father, John Koehne, was a sailor and later became a pilot. His mother was Catharine D. Koehne.

When Ernest Koehne started in life he took up the printing profession. He left home when he was about eighteen years of age and worked in the southern part of Germany. When twenty one years of age he came to America. In Germany he attended Technical High School and a Seminary for ministers in America.

At the time of this sketch he has been forty two years in ministry. His first church was at Lorain, Ohio. He then served in Altoona, Pa. For eighteen years he was in several congregations in Pittsburg. He then went to Dunkirk, N. Y., Erie, Pa., Cleveland, O., and for eight years was Presiding Elder in the Erie Conference. For four years, until now, he is on Kelleys Island, Ohio.

He is proud of the fact that he founded two new missions and helped to build a new church at Erie, Pa.

He is minister at The Evangelical Church, Headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio.

He was first married in Cleveland in 1883. His first wife departed life in 1915. He married the second time in 1916, and this wife passed away in 1919. In Sandusky in 1921 he married his third and present wife, whose maiden name was Mayme Rohrs. She was born in Napoleon, Ohio, and was the widow of John Schaedler of Kelleys Island, a well known and prominent citizen of Erie County.

Mr. Koehne has had one daughter, Dorothy, who departed this life at the age of twenty two in 1906.

