



Grosse Pointe Historical Society

L A K E S T E. C L A I R E

Local History Brought to Life!

The Grand Marais

Circa 1930

Chapter One

The Grand Marais

Presqu' Isle --- almost an island --- was the descriptive French name for the distant sandy knoll which lay beyond the ready sea, as isolated and as nearly as inaccessible as any island. Here, the few lighthouse people lived in solitary seclusion; their only neighbor was a hermit Frenchman who lived on Windmill Pointe and who spent his days hunting muskrats in the swamp and his nights in getting drunk. The main approach to Presqu' Isle was by water, but in certain seasons of the year, prior to 1877, one might reach it by the mainland, driving through Poupard's Lane, now Bishop Lane, to "La Grave Road", as the beach road was then called and thence along the shore below the marsh to the old windmill.⁵

Bordering Lake St. Clair and next to Windmill Pointe was the "Big Marsh" or in French "Grand Marais". It began at the site of the present water works on Jefferson Avenue and rolled away in a prairie-like sweep with marsh grass growing along the nearby Detroit River and Lake St. Clair as far up as Bishop Road in Grosse Pointe. When the autumn rains came, the entire surface was submerged, and the wintery frosts soon converted in into a miniature sea of glass. Previous to the draining of the Grand Marais, clay dykes were built, and a drainage canal was constructed in 1870. The dyke ran parallel to the lake one hundred feet from the shore, and a pumping station was erected to drain the Grand Marais at the foot of what is now Audubon Avenue. This station should not be confused with the old Windmill Pointe windmill which was used for the same purpose, but was constructed some time previously.

In 1874, George B. Moran, a descendant of one of the early pioneers of Grosse Pointe, became interested in the idea of drainage the Grand Marais. He investigated the marsh bottom and found that only a few feet down was a clay bottom which would make the drainage of the canal a feasible plan if the drainage process were carried out on a more scientific basis than before.

Mr. Moran then proceeded to buy up large portions of the marsh. After he had a large enough area in his possession, he had a bill passed by the State Legislature which would empower the County Drain Commission to build dykes and ditches. After the drainage canal was constructed, those farmers whose lands bordered the canal built drainage ditches of their own which emptied into the county canal. To aid in paying for the cost of construction, the farmers were assessed in proportion to their land holdings. The death of Mr. Moran's father in 1876, gave him an inheritance of about twenty five thousand dollars which enabled him to make certain improvements and to add to his holdings. In the course of time, he became the owner of nearly twenty-two thousand acres of cheap land which, was later subdivided and called Windmill Pointe subdivision. It was paved, landscaped and improved, and today Windmill Pointe with its picturesque landscape and beautiful homes is the residence of many of the wealthier citizens of the community. ³

The promontory projection of Presqu' Isle was early recognized by the War Department as being a hindrance to navigation. In 1837, the government purchased three-quarters acres in addition to a roadway. On this land, a lighthouse was constructed which was fifty feet above the water line. On the lake side of the lighthouse a sea wall was built to protect the foundations. On the land side, a wooden fence was erected.

Because of the increase in navigation, the lighthouse was re-built in 1875 about eighteen feet west of the original site. This old lighthouse, which is no longer used, may still be seen at the foot of Alter Road. Through the efforts of interested citizens, the War Department, in 1933, filled in more land and built a new lighthouse which is still in use and can be seen as far away as fourteen miles on a clear night.

During the winter nights when the Grand Marais and the river shore were frozen, excellent opportunities were offered for the amusement of the younger generation and any of those others who were young in heart. Skating and ice boating were indulged in more than any of the other various sports which were played on the ice. On Saturdays and Sundays, during the cold winters, cutters (carioles) filled with gay young men and laughing girls might be seen gliding over the glassy surface on the ice-bound marsh and lake, or if there were snow, speeding along the old high road where now extends the broad and beautiful Jefferson Avenue, each finally landing its freight of life and beauty at the Hotel de Grand Marais.

The seats of the carioles were always filled with mysterious baskets of food and packages which were speedily transferred to the long tables. After a toothsome lunch, the tables and benches were removed and dancing commenced to the inspiring strains of a cracked fiddle. Racing on the ice with their feet pacing or trotting French ponies was another favorite pastime.

Fishing was a sport enjoyed both in summer and in winter. The sport was of such quality that the angler could catch a sizable string of bass, perch, and pickerel. Today, however, fishing is not the sport it used to be because the marsh and feeding grounds were removed, and there is no longer any great attraction for the fish.

In the past, there have been many fisheries along the lake and river. In 1816, George McDougall received a parcel of property from Charles Poupard “--- during their lives the privilege of drawing a seine in co-partnership with the said McDougall and assigns, on the beach at the fishing grounds on the premises bounding on the Detroit River.”

A few years later, Joseph Spencer and Shradrach Gillet entered into a similar agreement by which Shradrach Gillet had the first commercial fishery at Windmill Pointe. This fishery was located next to the lighthouse extending west from Fox Creek and occupied 12.75 acres on the river front.

About 1850, this property passed into the hands of Peter and John Duflo who continued to operate a fishery there until 1890. The fishery changed ownership several times after this until the enactment of the Warner-Crampton law which prohibited fishing on the Detroit River and in Lake St. Clair.

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Chapter Two

Indians and Indian Troubles

Although no mention of an Indian settlement in Grosse Pointe is made by historians, the beautiful lake, St. Clair, was always a great attraction to the Indian, and was beloved by him. This district densely wooded and bordering the lake, was for years, the Indian hunting ground. Peche Island, just off Grosse Pointe shore was selected by the great chieftain, Pontiac, for his summer home until his death in 1762. There, he had a commanding view of the waterways and could visit the French farmers along the shore with out being discovered first.

The Indians were a constant source of fear and annoyance to the early settlers of Grosse Pointe. They used to land here when coming over from Canada and passing through the township would confiscate anything and everything which suit their fancy. Many cattle were driven off by them; horses, too, were driven off every year. The tribes were then so powerful that the settlers never dared to offer any resistance.

A gravel pit was, at one time, located at what is now the foot of Lakepointe Avenue. It was known for many years as the graveyard of the Fox nation because of the great number of Indians who fell in battle there. Many years later, farmers, while hauling gravel to be used for supporting the plank road maintained by the Hendrie Toll Gate Company, unearthed many skeletons of those who were buried where they fell.

"Through the intrigues of the English, the Iroquois planned to surprise and capture Fort Pontchartrain. This scheme was to be carried into effect through the efforts of the Ottagamies, known as the Fox, and the Mascontins, known as the Sacs from the Green Bay region.

"They arrived early in May while the friendly Hurons and Ottawas were out on a hunting trip. Swift runners were sent out to bring back the hunting parties who returned to rally to the aid of the post. The

Fox and Sacs, being greatly outnumbered, decamped on a dark night on the nineteenth day of the siege. A party of Frenchmen joined with the friendly Indians, and the fugitives were overtaken where they had entrenched themselves up the river at Presque-Isle, now known as Windmill Pointe.”³

The Church of Sainte Anne was close to the stockade and fearing that it might be set afire by blazing arrows and endanger the other buildings, the rattled commandant (pro-term), Du Buisson, burned it himself. The hostiles built a long breastwork within two hundred feet of the fort and fired hundreds of arrows tipped with blazing pitch into the roofs of the building. However, peltries in the warehouses were brought out, and the roofs were covered with wet skins which greatly reduced the danger of fire. After making an unsuccessful attempt to capture the fort and failing also to fire it, the Indians withdrew to the banks of Lake St. Clair, and commandant forthwith dispatched M. de Vincennes with a company of Frenchmen and an army of Indians to drive them away.

Here, reports as to the methods of military strategy used differ. Quoting from two reports on military tactics, these differences in interpretation may be compared. Quoting first from the report of Du Buisson, commandant (pro-term) of Fort Pontchartrain of June 15, 1712, to the Marquis de Vaudreuil, Governor-General of New France, capital of which was at Montreal.

“The pursuing (French) army stumbled unexpectedly into the entrenchments, and some twenty were killed or wounded.” In his report Du Buisson also stated that none of the ambushed Indians escaped. This was at Windmill Pointe, on the other side of the Grand Marais, where the Indians had thrown up hurried entrenchments. Here, the siege was renewed; guns, ammunition and food were supplied from the fort and were taken up the river in canoes. Du Buisson’s report continues; “The enemy held their position for four or five days, fighting with much courage; and, finally not being able to do any more, surrendered to our people who gave them no quarter. All were killed except the women and children whose lives were spared, and one hundred men who had been tied, but not escaped. All our allies returned to my fort with their prisoners. Their amusement was to shoot four or five of them every day. The Hurons did not spare a single one of theirs.”³

According to “Landmarks of Detroit”, edited by Catlin and others, “The attacking party found the enemy entrenched behind fallen trees near the present Windmill Pointe. Instead of charging their breastworks and sacrificing many lives in the assault, the French and their allies erected high stagings along the front of the works, and taking positions on these, they compelled the Foxes to keep under cover. The latter were not permitted to resort to the lake shore for water and were finally compelled by the torments of thirst to break cover and fly. They returned to their encampment at Green Bay.”²

“In this manner came an end to the two wicked nations who so sadly inflicted and troubled all the country. Our Indians lost sixty men, killed and wounded, thirty of whom were killed in the fort, and a Frenchman named Germain and five or six others who were wounded with arrows.”³

Years after the battle, a windmill was erected on this spot, thus changing its name from Presqu’ Isle to Windmill Pointe. This spot is now the foot of Lakepointe Avenue in Grosse Pointe Park. All evidences of the battlefield have long since been destroyed by the subdividing of the property and the building of many beautiful homes.

Shortly after one of the Indian raids into Ohio, Mrs. Grant, the wife of an early settler of Grosse Pointe, Commodore Grant, heard that a band of Indians had encamped at Hog Island (Belle Isle). They were to hold a “pow-wow” to celebrate their exploits and to torture and burn a young white captive whose mother they had killed. The commodore was away at the time, but his wife’s motherly instincts were aroused,

and knowing the love and esteem of the Indians for her family, she determined to make an effort to save the boy from so terrible a fate. She paddled over to Hog Island, made her way into the camp and asked the amount of ransom demanded for the child. The Indians, who were making preparations for the horrible festivities, would not at first listen to her pleas. The courageous woman was not to be baffled and by threats that the Black Gown (priest) would bring some calamity to the Indians, she succeeded in her mission. The little boy was brought home and adopted by his humane deliverer who had a large family (ten daughters) of her own.

Several objects of mystery were uncovered in 1926 on the estate of Edsel Ford on Gaulker's Pointe, Grosse Pointe Shores. A silver bracelet encircled the bone of a human forearm; a silver cross and lower jaw-bone set with a full array of well formed teeth were nearby. The silver bracelet was about two inches wide and the thickness of paper; the cross was six inches in height and bore a peculiar inscription. Joseph van Ashe, one of the first settlers, was consulted in regard to the discovery and said that Gaulker's Pointe, at the spot where the objects were unearthed, was under the water at the time of the early Indian arrivals. It has been a number of years since the water fell to a level that would allow any burials at the spot. The silver cross and silver bracelet would indicate that it was a burial of an Indian princess. He also told of the great bands of Chippewa and Huron tribes who often stopped for weeks at Gaulker's Pointe to camp and to make merry after having received their pension from the government at Detroit. They would usually make this trip in the spring of the year in canoes laden with furs, the results of their trapping in the forest in the far north. We would see them coming, the chief, his wife, and his children in the large canoe which headed the fleet. After the families were settled in camp, the men would proceed toward the fort to do their trading. I have watched the Indians bury their dead at night and could even now point out their burial spots along the shore. We played with the Indian children and learned many word of their language. I loved them as brothers and spent many happy hours of my childhood with them. I know their customs, signs and their language.

Another life long resident tells of the Indian trail in the rear of their farm on the shore and how the settlers were always just a little fearful and usually had some secret place or underground cave where they could escape should the Indians became menacing though the settlers were careful to provide them with a good meal should they make a friendly visit.

Now, today, there is no sign or anything that would indicate that the red men considered Grosse Pointe his hunting ground. With the coming of the European and his different way of living, the Indian gradually retreated and left behind only memories.

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Old Familiar Landmarks

Just beyond what is now Moran Road stood the Grant homestead, then known as Grant's Castle. This home has an interesting history. In 1774, Alexander Grant, a retired officer in the British navy, married Therese Campau in Detroit. About a year later, Commodore Grant had constructed a mansion of considerable size on his property in Grosse Pointe. Although research has failed to bring to light any information concerning the size of the house, it must have been very spacious because it was the home of the family of twelve daughters and a son which the Commodore and Madame Grant had.

The property, according to the various abstracts which have been presented, had a lake frontage of nine acres and a depth of about seventy-one acres. The estate, therefore, was about six hundred forty acres in area which was a large piece of property for those days even around Detroit.

Another residence, rich in historical interest, was the home of Mrs. T. P. Hall whose ancestors, the Godfrey family, obtained an estate, by letters patent, from Louis XIV dated September 15, 1668. The Godfreys named their estate "Tonnancouer", and Mrs. Hall took this name for her estate on the shore of Lake St. Clair.

It was on this estate that a grotto was constructed which commemorated the legend of the "Loup Garou", an evil beast who pursued a French maiden to this spot. She throws herself at the feet of a statue of the Virgin imploring aid and protection. As the Loup Garou leaped upon the rocks, he immediately changed to stone by the Virgin who had heeded the maiden's plea.

The old windmill, from which Windmill Pointe received its name, was erected on a point of land which extended out into the lake at the foot of what is now Lakepointe Avenue. The mill, described as being operated by wind power, was round and about thirty feet high. The foundation was of cobble stones with limestone above; the exterior was covered with a mixture of sand and limestone. The stones came from the shore of Lake St. Clair near where the mill was constructed.

Old French records show this mill, together with a house and barn, to have been on this property as early as 1759. The house was then occupied by Jean Baptiste Leduc, who, because of and proof to the contrary, might be considered the builder of the mill. Jean had a sister, Josette, who was slightly older than her brother and who eventually became half owner of the mill. One night, Josette died suddenly soon after having declared that she would leave her share of the mill to the devil. Many conflicting tales have grown up around this mill and about Josette and her brother.³ Doubtless, there is more to this strange death of Josette than is recorded, but until any new bibliography concerning the tragic circumstances comes to light, the mystery remains essentially as it is recorded here.

The mill itself was undoubtedly a crude affair, but it served the community and the farmers on both sides of the river with a means of grinding their grain. It performed the work more quickly and more efficiently than the hand method which was used before the mill was constructed. The fact that the Indians and farmers from the other side of the river crossed the lake in small boats loaded with grain would indicate a lack of grist mills on the river. The mill gave service until about 1800 when it was abandoned. About 1848, Maglory Beaufait, then the owner of the property, improved the mill by building a log house and barn adjacent to the mill facing the lake. About 1865, William G. Moran, a son of George Moran, obtained possession of the property and decided to build a new home. He tore down what was left of the old mill and used the limestone blocks for the foundation of his new house.

In 1876, William B. Moran, on the death of his father, Judge Charles Moran, inherited a sum of money which he used to acquire the land of William G. Moran, his cousin, which adjoined his property on the east. About four years later, William B. Moran formed a co-partnership with another cousin, Charles G. Moran, to form a realty company after having reclaimed some of the marsh land near the old mill. They named this parcel of land after the old grist mill, the foundations of which still remained on the point of land extending out into the lake. They named it the "Windmill Pointe Development Company".

In 1916, the Windmill Pointe Land Company was organized by a group which subdivided the property and developed the lake front by filling in both sides of the Pointe where the old mill had once ground the grain of the nearby farmers. This new improvement necessitated the removal of the foundations of the old mill which were still on the Pointe. This was the last of the old mill.

The general philanthropic movement during the early decades of the twentieth century, no doubt, played a large part in Mary Manning's inspiration when she planned and had erected in 1912 and 1913, thirty-two cement black cottages for the workingmen's families who lived in the Village of Grosse Pointe. They were built on property owned by her husband, Frederick H. Wadsworth and cost about fifteen hundred dollars apiece to construct. They supplied the need which existed at the time in Grosse Pointe for better homes for the working classes.

With an eye to the future, generous sized lots were plotted out; many were two hundred-fifty feet in depth thus allowing for ample garden and play space. The cottages were identical, being about 24 x 24 feet in size with six rooms and a bath. They were built on posts sunk into the ground and had no basement; stove heat was used. This method of heating was very common at the time. The cottages rented for a small sum per month. Through the years, some of them have been torn down in order to make way for more substantial and large dwellings until now, only about twelve are still standing. With the construction of the higher class dwellings, and the transition from a rural community to an urban community during the past decade, the cottages which are still standing are used for purposes other than those originally intended.

One, at the corner of Vernor Highway and St. Clair, was formally used by the Wayne County Library Commission and later by the Grosse Pointe Board of Education as a public library. It is now used as a small gift shop. Another dwelling across the street is still used a private home. The building on Maumee near St. Clair has been used for some time by the City of Grosse Pointe as a city hall, and the one next door was occupied by the "Thrift Shop" operated by the Neighborhood Club of Grosse Pointe before it was moved to the cottage on St. Clair and Vernor Highway.

Near the corner of Oxford Road and Lake Shore Boulevard are three giant pear trees possibly two hundred years old, and for size and vigor, they are truly remarkable. The fruit is of about average dimensions and ripening about the end of August. The flesh is crisp, juicy, sweet and spicy. It seems rather unfortunate that so little should be known of the history of a tree of such extraordinary character. The memory of the oldest inhabitant is only traditional in regard to them. The prevailing theory, that these pear trees originated from seeds brought them from France, is based upon the supposition that nursery trees could not have withstood the long sea voyage of that period. Yet, this opinion cannot be accepted without hesitation. I know not by what fatality, but these old French pear trees seem destined to have not successor to their fame. No one has thought of continuing the species, or else, all attempts have failed. Only along the Detroit and Raisin rivers can this species of pear tree be found. Another half century will see the last of these magnificent trees which were once the pride of the early settlers of Grosse Pointe.

In the park in front of the City of Detroit Waterworks on East Jefferson stands a magnificent pear tree, older than the memory of any man. It is the last of the "Mission Pears" which were so named, because of their numbers, after the twelve Apostles. All seedlings from this remnant of a proud race have refused to grow, therefore, it bids fair to have no successor to its glory.

Hubbard, writing of a period now almost a century gone, characterizes them as "truly remarkable for size, vigor and productiveness. A bole of from six to eight feet in girth and a height of one hundred feet was common. Many showed a trunk circumference of eight or nine feet. They bore uniform crops – thirty to fifty bushels being the product of a single tree.

Another venerable old pear tree worth mentioning is one which was planted on the old Rivard farm, now on the estate of Dr. Fred. Murphy, in Grosse Pointe Farms. It stands about one hundred feet in height, and behind it are eleven old French apple trees which are called the "Apostles"; the pear tree which completes the number is named the "Judas" tree.

These pear trees have been the inspiration for poets. These two verses were taken from the "History of Michigan" written by Silas Farmer. The first poem was written by J. L. Bates of which this is the last verse.

"Many a thrifty Mission Pear yet o'erlooks the blue St. Clair,
Like a veteran, faithful warden; and their branches gnarled and olden,
Yield their juicy fruits and golden,
In the ancient Jesuit garden.
Still each year their blossoms dance,
Scent and bloom of sunny France".

The second, taken from the same book, was written by W. H. Coyle of which the ninth and last verses are quoted here.

"Where the white sailed ship now rides the waves,
Ye have watched the bark canoe,
And heard in the night the voyageurs' songs,
And the Indians' shrill halloo.

"Live on old trees, in your green age,
Long, long may your shadows last
With your blossomed boughs and golden fruit,
Love emblems of the past".

Now, there are but few lone survivors among the old pear trees; the ravages of time have taken their toll. Soon, there will be nothing to remind us of those days when the fleur-de-lis gaily waved over the land which we now call Grosse Pointe except the legends and memories handed down to us by those who have passed on to a far and distant land.

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Chapter Four

Old Road Houses

Near the site of the Grosse Pointe High School once stood Hudson's House. In 1778, it served as both hotel and tavern for the community. It is claimed that Hudson's House was the first tavern of its kind to be established in Grosse Pointe.⁴ It was demolished during the eighteen fifties and was replaced by a brick establishment which later became known as Fisher's Road House. Here, frog leg dinners were served to thousands of Detroiters who made the journey especially to partake of the delicious dinners for which Fisher's House had then become famous.

Fisher's House was one of the most famous of the many road houses which operated in the township during the Civil War and post-Civil War period. During the early eighteen fifties, Merritt M. Fisher purchased the old Hudson property, then a part of the Ten Eyck farm in Grosse Pointe Farms, and built a new establishment on the property at the foot of Fisher's Lane, now known as Fisher Road.

Mr. Fisher had discovered a clay deposit about a half mile away, and there, he constructed a brick kiln and supplied the contractors with the necessary brick which was used in the construction of his tavern. The hotel was three stories high with a frontage and depth of about one hundred feet. The full front veranda which ran along the front must have given the hotel an outstanding reputation in the country. Inside, were ten large guest rooms in addition to the family and servant's quarters.

The Grosse Pointe Democratic Club made the building its headquarters for many years, and during every Presidential campaign, the club members would cut a seventy-foot hickory tree from the nearby woods. After stripping it, they would plant the pole on the front lawn and fasten a broom at the top with a banner depicting an image and the name of the preferred presidential candidate. The pole raising was accompanied by a period of political stumping, and outstanding Grosse Pointe Democrats would make political speeches.

The campaign of 1865 was a festive occasion still remembered by old Grosse Pointers. J. Logan Chipman, former city attorney, was a Congressional candidate. The hickory pole was elevated as usual, and Mr. Chipman made a few speeches on the front lawn. Mr. Chipman established his campaign headquarters at Fisher's House, and, here, were held many gay parties which often lasted until the next morning.

After Mr. Fisher's death in 1861, Mrs. Fisher operated the established for some time until she leased it to Proctor Weaver who managed it until 1875 under the name of Fisher Hotel when he built his own road house he called Weaver House. The hotel was then leased to Frank Belisle who continued the name of Fisher Hotel until 1886. That year, Mrs. Fisher sold the property to about seven acres for \$16,000 to a group of prominent Grosse Pointe citizens who organized the Grosse Pointe Club. They erected a new club house on the property that same year. Later, however, the name was changed to the The Country Club. The building was of frame construction with three stories cupola on the roof and a full veranda which covered the front and one side.

This property was later purchased by the late Horace Dodge about 1929, and his widow, the present Mrs. Hugh Dillman, erected her new Grosse Pointe home there in 1932. The Country Club was moved to a new brick house east of adjacent to the old site behind the Grosse Pointe Memorial Church on the shore of Lake St. Clair.²

Another of the famous road houses in Grosse Pointe was operated by John Neff. Erected in 1887, it was the gathering center for sportsmen and hunters. It was of frame construction two stories high and a frontage of about seventy-five feet with a depth of one hundred feet. It was located on the north side of Jefferson Avenue just west of Neff Road (then in Grosse Pointe Village).

Prior to the opening of the annual deer hunting season, members of the Grosse Pointe Gun Club would gather here to improve their marksmanship by shooting from the lawn of the hotel toward the lake at a target made from old campaign posters and cards fastened to cedar posts sunk into the ground at regular intervals. The shooting matches took place every year from 1880 until 1906 when shooting became illegal because of the new homes which were springing up along the shore of the lake.

The hotel was widely known for its frog legs and fresh fish dinners which attracted not only Grosse Pointers, but many outsiders as well. If, after the rounds of card playing and other amusements were over, the guests were too tired to make the trip home, Mr. Neff would provide accommodations for them.

After Mr. Neff's retirement in 1908, August (Gus) Doerr purchased the Neff Hotel and operated it for six years under the name of Doerr's Inn. Doerr seemed a bit more progressive than his predecessor and decided to cater to the younger generation of Grosse Pointe and Detroit. He engaged an orchestra and set off enough space on the ground floor for dancing. This was the beginning of a new era in the world of Grosse Pointe road houses. They became scenes of nightly gayety, and later, floor shows were added to the entertainment.

In 1920, Doerr retired and leased the place to Brake and Wagner who disbanded in 1921. The inn was then leased to Jim Hall and Will Rogers who operated it until 1925 on a restaurant permit under the name of Doerr's Inn until the Bureau of Internal Revenue placed government padlocks on the doors because of the violation of the Eighteenth Amendment. Charles Postal had the padlocks removed and operated the place for about six months until he, too, gave it up. The place remained vacant until 1936 when it was torn down.⁵

Charles Veriden (Verheydan) opened the Veriden House on the north side of Lake Shore Drive at Cook Road. It was opened in 1886 and was operated until 1900. The place was noted for its cock fights as well as for its frog legs and chicken dinners. People came from far and near to witness the cock fights and to place wagers on the outcomes. Mr. Veriden sold the business to Phil van Asche who operated the inn until 1902 when it burned down.

A new and larger frame building was erected with a full porch in front and dancing space for the use and enjoyment of those who wished to dance. It was operated by Frank Veriden, the brother of Charles, from 1902 until 1910. In addition to the famous cock fights, week-end dancing parties were also held, and music was furnished by an orchestra. About 1910, Frank Veriden organized the Grosse Pointe Ice Boat Club in addition to operating the road house. In 1918, the Ice Boat Club was taken over by another group which formed the nucleus of the present Grosse Pointe Yacht Club which is now located at the foot of Vernier on Lake Shore Drive.

In 1914, Frank Verhayden decided to open still another place on the northwest corner of Hillger and Goethe avenues, then in St. Clair Heights, Grosse Pointe Township now in Detroit. He operated this place until the beginning of prohibition in 1918. This place was known as the 101 Ranch, and because of the numerous brawls which took place there, it was also known as the "Bucket of Blood".

About this time, Frank Verhayden decided to open another place. This time, it was on Moross Road near Lake Shore Drive. It was named the "Dugout". Verhayden operated it from 1920 until his death in 1931.⁴

Still another of the road houses of the past was the Moran Road House which was erected by George Moran in 1870 at the foot of what is now Moran Road on the shore of Lake St. Clair, and the rear portion was constructed out over the lake. It was his idea to construct numerous small ponds where live fish were kept until needed to satisfy the appetite of a hungry guest. Here, too, were kept a number of live sturgeon for which people would dive and try to bring to the surface and thus win a prize. Mr. Moran operated this road house until it fell into the lake.¹

No enumeration of bygone road houses would be complete without the mention of Castle House which was so named because of its style of architecture. It was a two-story frame building with a front of seventy-five feet in length and a depth of about fifty feet. The top section extended about twelve feet above the roof proper and it resembled a castle tower with an uneven top representing loop holes. The balance of the roof also had a parapet with loop holes around the entire building. The place was built by Paul Rivard about 1900 on the Ferdinand Rivard estate on the north-west corner on University Place and Lake Shore Drive. Mr. Rivard never operated the road house personally, but he leased it to Henry Termott who operated it there until it was moved, about 1910, to its present location at 784 St. Clair Avenue. Termott sublet the saloon portion to John Mayton who also had charge of the old William Tell Archery Club. The road house was the gathering place for the Belgian families of Grosse Pointe who would congregate there on Sundays and pass the time away in gossiping and in other forms of amusement. Although the structure was moved quite some time ago to the present location on St. Clair Avenue, the original style of architecture has not been materially altered.⁵

The Weaver House was another of the many old road houses; it was located on the north- east corner of Notre Dame and Jefferson Avenues. The building was about sixty feet wide and extended back about fifty feet. It was erected in 1875 by Procter Weaver who had previously surrendered his lease of the Fisher House. The place was also known as Aunt Kate Weaver's Hotel, and it was also famous for its frog leg dinners, its slot machines and other forms of amusement. The place was later taken over by John Marquette who operated from 1895 until 1901 under the original name.⁵

Henry Blondell then obtained possession of the premises in 1901. He was rather progressive and established a dance pavilion and installed a player piano to furnish the music. Blondell was one of the most popular resort keepers in Grosse Pointe. He was well known for his feats of strength and had

previously traveled with a circus of strong men performing on a high platform, lifting horses and groups of people with harness over his shoulders. He would give nightly exhibitions of strength gratis for the entertainment of his many patrons, and the Weaver House was the most patronized place in the township. Patrons would come from long distances, bringing with them such articles as telephone books and decks of playing cards for Blondell to tear into small pieces with his bare hands. He would also bend bars around his neck. It was a standing joke for him to bend currency of quarters and dimes before returning it to his customers. After the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment, the building was torn down. Mr. Blondell passed away in 1936 and was survived by his sons, Harry and Neil.¹

Another road house of outstanding popularity was the Chauvin House. It was built in 1886 at the foot of Nottingham and Jefferson Avenues and operated until 1890 and specialized in chicken and frog leg dinners. A company of the Michigan National Guard, then known as the Montgomery Rifles, built a private shooting range behind the building where they held rifle practice. In 1898 the company was called up for active service in the Spanish-American War as Company M, thirty-second Michigan Volunteer Infantry, and the range came to an end.³

There have been several other road houses which operated for various lengths of time during the decades of the “nineties”. They all, sooner or later, went out of business for good after the Volstead Act became part of the Constitution as the Eighteenth Amendment. Road houses are now a thing of the past, and their place is taken by the beer gardens and taverns of modern construction and along more modern ideas. All that is left as reminders of a past age are the memories of the old timers, and a few houses of an architecture of the last century which were, at one time, a part of that atmosphere known as the “Gay Nineties”.

Bibliography for Chapter Four

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