

Catawba Island, the Great Peach Growing Center of Ohio

From *Sketches and Stories of the Lake Erie Islands*, by Lydia J. Ryall, American Publishers, Norwalk, OH, 1913
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"Why, and wherefore an island?" This question is usually the first formulated and put by the curiosity seeking stranger who approaches Catawba Island by stagecoach from Port Clinton - which, by the way, is the most available, and at certain seasons the only feasible, route thither.

A trip to an island by stagecoach, instead of in a boat! The idea appears anomalous as it is novel: something similar to going to sea by rail, and, to discover how the thing is done, grows into a matter of keen interest as the observer progresses.



His geography informs him that an island is "a body of land entirely surrounded with water"; and looking ahead - as the driver whips up his team - he vaguely wonders where, and how far along, the water lies, and how they are to get across it. Imagine, then, his complete surprise when, after a jaunt of several miles, the driver informs him that the mainland is already far behind, and that they are now on Catawba Island. Had the stranger turned back a few miles over the route, to a place where the two main thoroughfares, the "sand road," and "lakeside" road, form a cross, or fork, he might have been shown a narrow ditch with an unpretentious bridge thrown across it. This ditch, terminating at the lake, is all that now serves to make Catawba an island. Old settlers can remember, however, a narrow but clearly defined channel that extended between it and the mainland. Among the Indians who as late as 1831 made the wilds of Catawba a rendezvous, there was rife a tradition that the course of the Portage River extended originally where only the ditch now remains, and that the water of this river, flowing towards its outlet at West Harbor, formed the island.

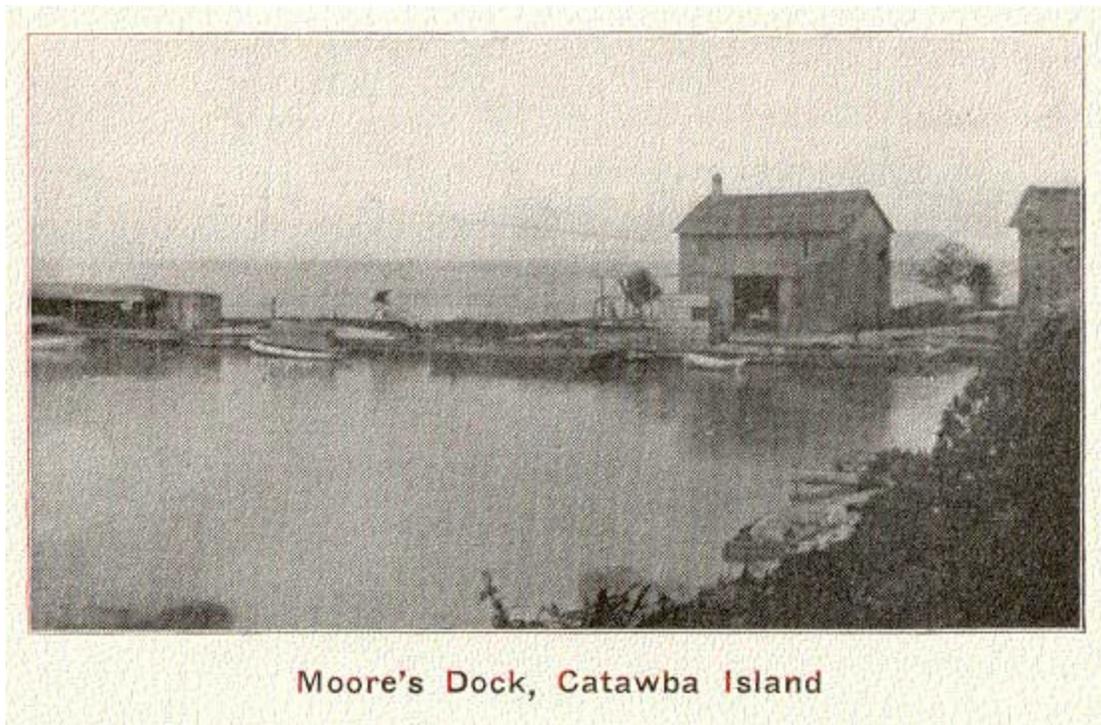
The southwestern portion of Catawba - an attenuated neck of land - reaches to a point within about two miles of Port Clinton. Advancing in a northeasterly direction from this point, the island gradually widens to a breadth of about two miles. Its length is seven miles, with a shoreline following the numerous projections and indentations - of considerable length.

The ditch, aforementioned, gradually widens into a channel, and the channel into quite an expansive body of water known by the above-mentioned name of "West Harbor," "Middle" and "East Harbor" lying adjacent.

The island's westerly shore is broken by a line of high bluffs - lime rock formations, cave indented and picturesque. "Sugar Rock," a curious formation on the west shore, rises conelike into view, a small lake at its base. "Sugar Rock" formed a spot well known and favored by the Ottawa Indians, by whom it was used as a burial site for their dead; and when before the tribe finally departed for hunting grounds farther westward, representatives thereof were accustomed to revisit annually these graves, there to perform their weird ceremonials.

Numerous relics, including arrow heads, coins, pipes, hatchets and human bones, have there been unearthed in recent years.

"Moore's Dock," on the west shore, a place of some interest, is approached from one of the main thoroughfares by a branch road that threads its way among peach and pear orchards, interspersed by thrifty corn patches, and truck gardens. "Sugar Rock," to the left, is covered also with well tilled and thrifty orchards. Water lilies float on the surface of the lake at its base, which, viewed in its setting of trees, vines, and wild vegetation generally, forms a pretty picture.



A number of handsome summer cottages are here located, together with those of island dwellers. Moore's Dock forms also the headquarters of one of the island fish companies, G. W. Snyder & Son. In addition to a warehouse, twine, packing, and ice houses, and a small boarding house known as "Apple Cottage", the company employs quite a number of men and boats, and operate a large number of nets. Viewed from Moore's Dock, on clear day, the court house tower, spires of churches, and prominent business blocks in Port Clinton, are plainly visible. Many handsome residences and fanciful summer cottages are noted at different points southward of this place, and on every portion of the island. Port Clinton is the official seat of Ottawa County, of which Catawba Island forms a township.

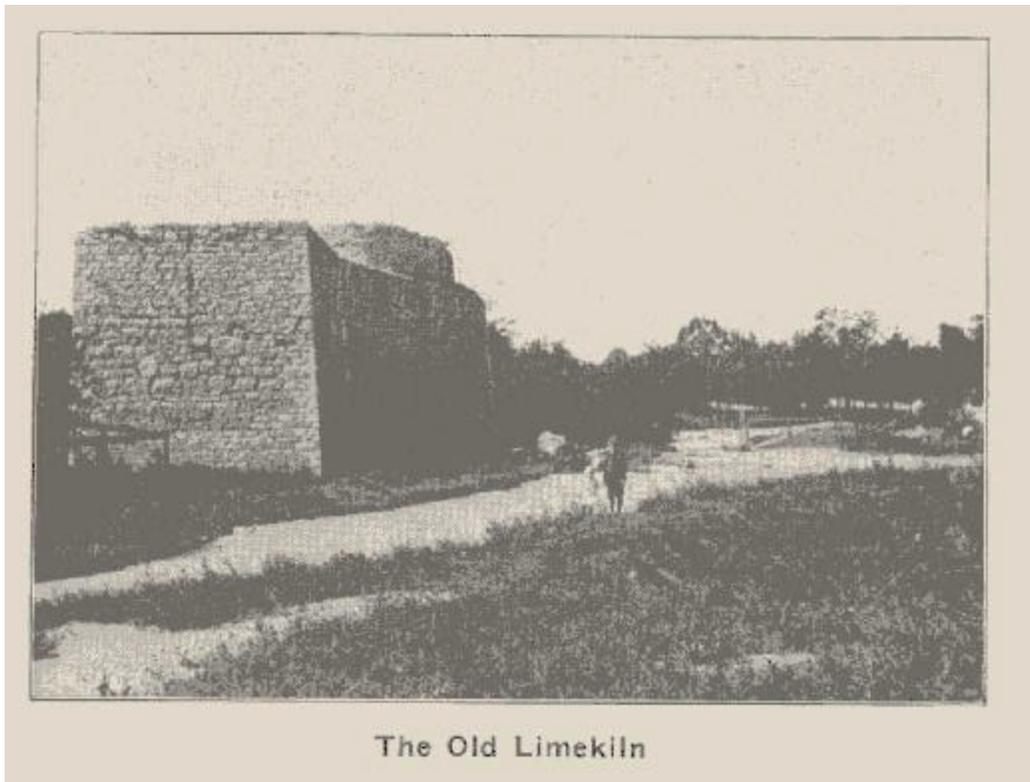
"Peachton," once a post office, was robbed of this honor by the introduction of the rural delivery .The place boasts of a church - Methodist Episcopal - and a schoolhouse. The island cemetery, a well kept and beautiful spot, is also located near Peachton.

The northeast shore abounds also in scenery of an attractive character; a secluded, but breezy and restful location; where several handsome summer cottages scattered along its curving line are occupied by Pittsburg people of wealth, and prominence, who with servants, automobiles and other transferable luxuries, come to spend the sultry months of summer.

At the island 's extreme point is situated that which is known as "Ottawa City." It's not much of a "city," at present date, though a delightful location for one.

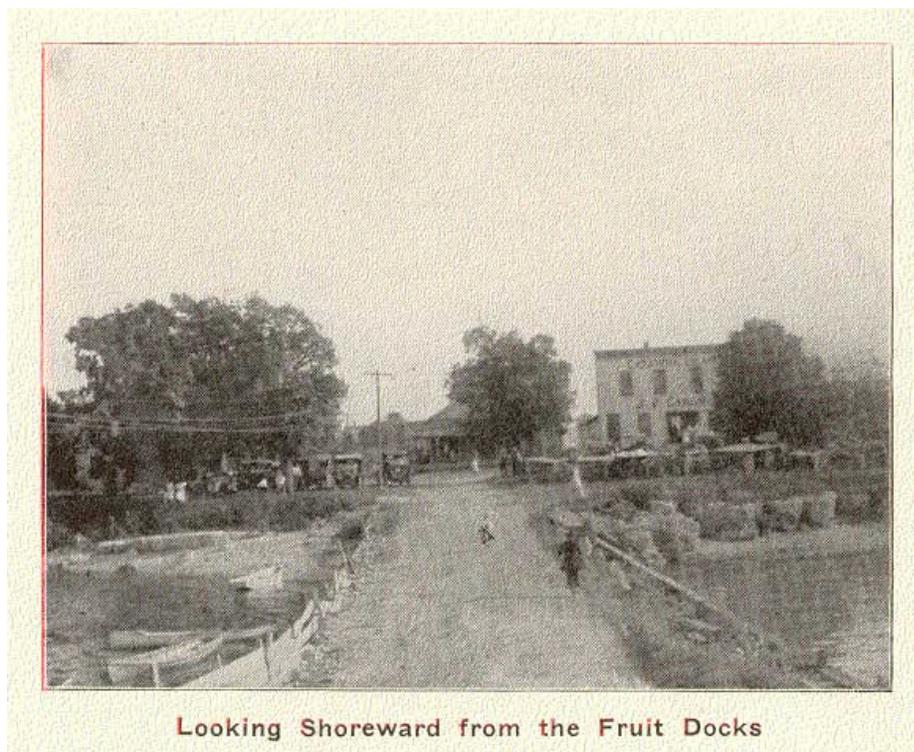
The circumstance which gave rise to the name about sixty years ago, was the introduction of the cement industry, which promised great things for the island and "Scott's Point," as the outer projection was then termed. So sure of the rapid development and building up of the point, were the inhabitants, that after christening it Ottawa, after the Indian tribe that last occupied it, they tacked on "city." The commercial outlook at that time was such, indeed, as to induce sanguine conclusions. A few facts concerning the cement boom, as given by a Catawba resident, are annexed:

J. R. James, a New York capitalist, it seems, had at some time in the island's history become owner of considerable land along the west shore near "Scott 's Point." Strong in the belief that a good quality of cement could be made from limestone, there found in quantity inexhaustible, Mr. James erected extensive works for the production of cement, one J. S. Dutcher being employed as builder, and superintendent. A large force of men were employed to quarry the stone, and to run the works, and much interest in the project was manifested. For various reasons, however, the business did not prove as remunerative as had been expected, and after a five years trial the enterprise was abandoned. Though not officially so stated, it was understood that the shipment of an inferior lot of the commodity, on one occasion during the superintendent's absence, spoiled the market and permanently injured the trade. The machinery was removed to an Eastern field of operations; but the large warehouse, the deep overgrown quarry, and the limekiln connected with the plant, still remain - picturesque relics of the boom that bursted.



The Old Limekiln

Still another opportunity remains, however, whereby "Ottawa City" may yet become a city in reality, as well as in name. This undoubtedly may be accomplished by an extension of the peninsula electric line to Ottawa Point and connecting this terminal with Put-in-Bay by means of a ferry line. In this way Catawba Island may be made easily accessible, a condition that would bring thither a great many people who otherwise would never see this interesting bit of creation.



Looking Shoreward from the Fruit Docks

Ottawa City, of the present forms an attractive little burg with a beautiful shore front, including a fine view of "Mouse" Island - owned by heirs of the late Ex. -Pres. R. B. Hayes.

An ample pier, built by the Catawba Island Fruit Co., affords accommodation to steamers of large size, a large warehouse built thereon furnishing space for thousands of bushels of peaches shipped annually to Detroit, and elsewhere.

The Port Clinton steamer "Falcon" also makes this dock a regular landing place.

The dock and warehouse of the Booth Fish Co. occupy still another shore point. This company does an extensive business. A fruit warehouse owned by J. P. Caugney fronts on one of the principal streets. A half dozen hotels and boarding cottages once formed a part of the place, but one of the number, the "Pittsburg House," was recently destroyed by fire.



"Lake View House," owned by J. W. Gamble, is widely known and favored by a large circle of summer patrons, - the island being quite famed as a summer resort, in spite of its isolation.

For many years past Mr. and Mrs. John K' Burg kept their doors open to summer people, having a commodious and attractive home in a tree-clad nook of the beautiful shore. Though the recent death of her husband left Mrs. K' Burg alone with the cares of the place, their old friends, the summer people, still remember her and the location.



Still another old stand at Ottawa City is the general merchandise store, of which C. C. West was proprietor for a period of forty-five years, Mr. West, who is the oldest man on the island, recently celebrated his ninetieth birthday by retiring from business and taking a

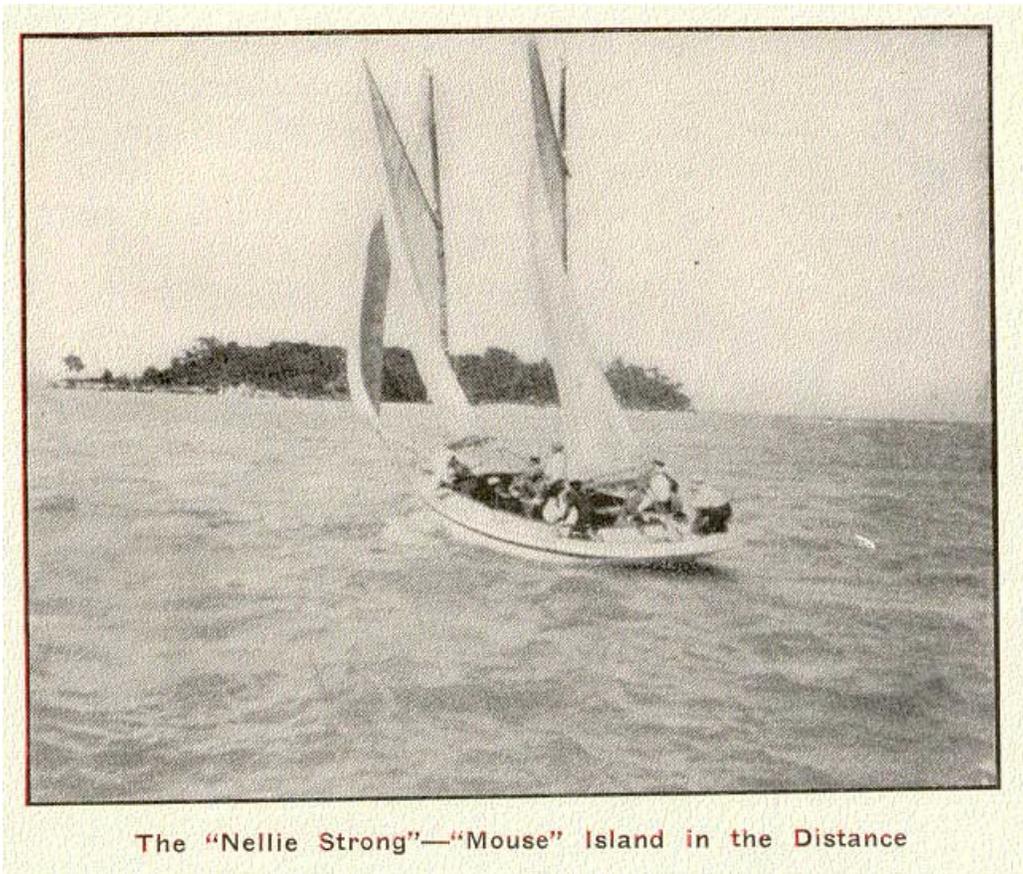
vacation. He was also postmaster for a number of years. Leon Stevens and Lake Owens are the new proprietors. Mr. Sharp keeps an ice cream parlor and bowling alley.

A neat schoolhouse serves the wants educational of the youthful islanders, and two churches, Episcopal and a chapel devoted to union services, point the morals and religious sentiments of the community.

In the place are many attractive residences. The Ottawa City dwellers are now paving their way to city honors by introducing stone paved thoroughfares, and their hopes will thus be fixed upon a more solid basis than when the stone was made into cement.

An ancient shore line, set with crags and punctured with cavernous openings, crosses Catawba Island - interesting alike to the geologist, and nature student. There are many varieties of plants also, such as are found in but few other localities. A line of broken and picturesque rocks along the west shore abound in romantic scenery.

Thanks to the "Nellie Strong," and her master, Capt. Eli Rogers, the islanders are afforded facilities by which they may reach Sandusky and adjacent islands by boat.



The tug "Major Wilcox" is frequently seen at Catawba during the fishing season. While Mr. C. C. West holds the honor of being the oldest man on the island, Mr. Lorenzo Bailey is known as the oldest settler. At the age of eighty, Mrs. Flora Porter is a round-faced, sprightly woman, with a clear memory of the early days.

Returning once more to the subject of the Pt. Clinton and Catawba Island mail route - taken all the year through, it is probably one of the most interesting and important found in Ohio. Especially is this true in winter. Below is what a Cleveland newspaper says of the route:

J. P. Cangnay of Catawba Island retired from the mail-carrying service yesterday, after having been connected with the Catawba Island route for fifty years. Mr. Cangnay has been connected with the mail carrying and passenger business all his life, as was his father

before him. His contract expired June 30, when he was succeeded by William Stevens, who received the contract for \$725 per year.

The post office is located on the extreme north end of Catawba Island, nine miles from the Port Clinton office and four miles by water from Put-in-Bay. The greater part of Catawba Island is supplied by rural free delivery. The island mail is a star route contract between there and Port Clinton, on the New York Central, and this mail is carried every day in the year except Sunday. During December, January, February and March the Put-in-Bay, Middle Bass and North Bass mails become a part of this contract and an extra trip every day is made to accommodate Put-in-Bay people. This makes two round trips a day for the Catawba Island carrier, in the very worst of stormy winter weather.

Mike Carney, six feet five in height, has been a faithful driver for Mr. Cangnay for many years and is well known by the many Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Pittsburg and Toledo people who spend their summers on the islands. Many a good story can be told of Mike and his various experiences during his cold winter drives.

Everything dead or alive is hauled by the mail carriers in the same conveyance. If the island people are in need of anything in the line of express or freight, a dead hog or a live one, even caskets for the dead, their wants were made known to Mr. Cangnay, by phone, and he was at their service. And their needs were cared for at the required time. Many times the mail wagon would carry a coffin and in the same rig would ride friends of some dead person at Put-in-Bay. All would be loaded into the little boat and hauled across the lake by the Morrison brothers, who risk their lives during the winter months in getting the mail to and from the mainland to the islands.

Since the above was published there have been additional changes – “Mike” Carney, the driver of reminiscent memory, has crossed “The Great Divide,” but his team of brown bays still does duty on the route.