



MIDDLE BASS CLUB, MIDDLE BASS I.

Why Middle Bass Club?

My name is Lisa Fine, and I am putting together a great story. It incorporates all the elements of life: society, personalities, marriages, births, deaths, and the beauty of nature thrown in as a backdrop. The story encompasses the history of a small portion of Middle Bass Island called Middle Bass Club.

My husband and I bought one of the old homes there in 2003, and having committed ourselves to restoring it, we gradually became more intrigued by the history of the house as well as that of the Club itself.

In the process of cleaning out the attic, I found a photograph of Silas Cornell Walbridge and two of John Berdan. These men were leaders in the Toledo community in the late 1800s-early 1900s. Their families and friends comprised the

society of the Club in this era. Additionally, Walbridge had been the second owner of our house, from 1906-1924.

As I continue to talk and exchange pictures with many of you, the pieces of history are gradually coming into place. My goal is to assemble the memories and photographs into a more complete synopsis of what life was like back then in the Club. In addition, I would like to feature human interest stories about various activities and people in the club.

I am working closely with the Lake Erie Islands Historical

Society as well as University of Toledo in this quest. The final product will be provided to you as well as to these organizations so that it can be shared for all time.

I appreciate your interest and support! Keep those cards and letters coming...



Our cottage in the Middle Bass Club, Grove Ave.

The White Building on the Sidebar...

If you look at the top left of this page, you'll notice the large white building. This was the second clubhouse for the Middle Bass Club. It was built in 1882, after the first clubhouse was outgrown by the highly popular club. (The original clubhouse was built in 1874.)

The Club limited its membership to 200; members had to apply in writing and be recommended by two existing members. Then a ball vote was taken of the entire membership, three black balls signaling rejection. (Now you know the meaning of the term

"blackballed").

A handful of the members had also bought property across from the clubhouse and had cottages built. However, none of these cottages had kitchens; members and visitors all were required to take their meals in the clubhouse.

By the 1940s, all the cottages had been retrofitted with kitchens. The clubhouse was no longer used, and the costs of maintaining it were prohibitive. Also, there was the possibility that it represented a fire hazard; as a result, it was torn down in 1948.

At present, one can get a vague idea of where the clubhouse used to stand. Stone footers are still visible in a few locations. Other than the cottages themselves, the last remaining structure of the Club is the brick pumphouse at the western tip of Middle Bass Island.

In its heyday, the Club had tennis courts, a chapel, a bowling alley, a gas generation plant, a boathouse and docks, an icehouse, and waterworks. It was a very self-contained and self-sustaining community in the early 1900s.

Helping in the History Quest

Some of you are grandchildren of early Club members. Others are interested friends who may have never been to the Club. In talking to a few of you, you've stated, "But I was never there...I don't know anything." However, upon reflection, you realized grandma or grandpa had left you some old pictures or letters. Being able to see these materials would be very helpful for me. If you come



Middle Bass Club boathouse and dock, early 1900s

across this kind of stuff, I would like to visit with you and review these materials. But how do you know what to look for?

A lot of people back in the early days took pictures of their friends or family members in front of the clubhouse. Look for evidence of that white structure somewhere in the picture. Another good giveaway is the presence of one or more Victorian homes in the background of the picture. Additionally, the Middle Bass Club is right on the Lake Erie waterfront. It had a boathouse and dock. Evidence of either of these would confirm that the photo was taken at the Club.

Look for people getting off of a steamship or ferry; as many of these plied the lake transporting passengers from Detroit, Sandusky, and Toledo to the island.

Another good clue is the presence of grapevines somewhere in the photo. Wil-

liam Rehberg, Andrew Wehrle and their descendants cultivated grapes and made wine in the latter part of the 1800s-early 1900s. The vineyards bordered the Club property at one time.

You also may come across a photo taken inside what appears to be a dark hall; this could be from inside the clubhouse or Rehberg Hall (which was right next to the Club grounds and often frequented by members).

Some of the furniture is also very characteristic. Most of the cottages had quite a bit of wicker in them, as did the clubhouse.

If you have any questions about pictures that you find, give me a call or write, and I'd be glad to discuss them with you. My contact information is on the back page of this newsletter.

The cottage...and what we're doing with it

When we bought the cottage, it had damage in several places. A windstorm the prior year had caused a falling tree to strike a glancing blow to the roof and porch. This storm had accelerated cracking of inside walls, as well as necessitating a rebuild of the porch structure. Some rotting of base beams at the SW corner of the house had to be repaired.

There was rotting of the back porch as well, and displacement of the support pillars. Several windows are weathered and rotted; many of them do not open properly due to degradation of the foundation and differential settling of the house as a result.

Over the years and in the hands of several owners, the house has been "modernized" (post 1920s items added) to some degree: wall to wall carpeting had been placed in some of the rooms, as well as modern fixtures, wallpaper, paneling, cabinets and linoleum.

We launched right into the project the day we closed on the house: we had brought a 12' open trailer with lumber and many new power tools to the closing, and headed over to the island immedi-

ately afterwards.

Our estimates of time and \$\$\$ to accomplish the first (major) tier restoration is six years and about \$60,000. Our goal is to restore the cottage to her former stature and to convey the flavor and style of the entire Middle Bass Club in the period prior to 1920.

We are taking some license with this, as we realize the original house did not have a kitchen, nor the upstairs bathroom. However, we plan on keeping the kitchen and bathroom in their "modern" formats. Our primary focus has been in the front room and porch, where the Victorian and Edwardian families and friends would have congregated anyway. Notice in most homes of the period how the most lavish appointments are in these areas, while rear and upstairs rooms were somewhat spare in appearance.

The original cottage (see photo at right) had a low surround on the porch and fewer pillars than the current configuration. We had to discard the surround due to the necessity of rebuild-

ing the porch in such a manner so as to support the weight of the upper structure more effectively. This porch reconstruction originated with the last owner, and we completed it in late 2003.

Jeff and I are doing the majority of the work ourselves, on weekends during the spring, summer and fall. Our work plan allows us to focus on discrete parts of the house while keeping the rest of it usable and open to guests.



Our cottage in 1907

Some Club Pictures to Share with You....



This is the picture of John Berdan that we found in the attic of the cottage. He was the son of Toledo's first mayor.



The first cottage, built by Frank P. Isherwood in 1874



The original sidewalk still exists through most of the Club grounds. Here is a small section of it with a mark denoting North on it



The original Middle Bass Club clubhouse, 1874–1882



Ok, no, this airport is not at the Club itself...but is the new airport servicing Middle Bass Island. If you think it looks like a postage stamp, I can assure you — it is. But after many trips here, I am confident in my abilities to land on this sub-1800' strip!



The Arrow — one of the many steamers that plied Lake Erie transporting people to the Bass Islands in the late 1800s and early 1900s

Taken at the Middle Bass Club dock prior to 1910. Note the boathouse in the background. Any idea who these people might be?



MIDDLE BASS CLUB HISTORY PROJECT

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*Sharing the past....as we look
towards the future!*

An open invitation:

Jeff and I would like to invite you to visit the Middle Bass Club and our cottage during open season (late June— early September is the best time weatherwise). Please contact us if you are interested and we'll help facilitate your visit.

The “Project Leader”

Thank you for taking the time to share your stories and pictures with me, and to answer my questions. I hope that I've been able to help you fill in some of your own family stories as well.

To tell you a bit about me: I'm married to the good looking guy on the right side of this photo. Jeff and I are both pilots and skiers (we race in a league during the winter!). He is my best friend and stiffest competitor on the slopes.

Years ago, when I had better knees, I was a runner and hiker. I ran the Boston Marathon three times and finished twice. I was slow (~4 hrs) but completely happy to have made this achievement. When I segued into backpacking, weekends found me up in the White Mountains of NH all the time. I still find time to get back there once in awhile. It's been over 5 years, but I made another pilgrimage to Mt. Washington and even got myself to the top once again!

I also used to be an avid sailor, having owned a small boat on the Massachusetts coast 15 years ago. Vacations found me singlehanded up the coast of Maine and collecting impressions and adventures.

Additionally, I have been a musician my whole life. I've played a number of instruments including violin, clarinet, oboe, saxophone, and guitar. Currently, I play the recorder for my own enjoyment (yes, that same instrument your grade schooler had to try out before picking a REAL instrument to learn— however, I have a neat collection of professional recorders and am intensively studying baroque music as well as period pieces from the late 1800s—not too unlike what the orchestra would have played down at the Middle Bass Club boathouse on warm summer evenings).

Just this past summer, I performed at the Middle Bass Club Fine Arts Festival. It's probably the first time in 20 years that I've played to an audience. It was a great experience but I can say that I was VERY nervous. Very different than being a public speaker, which I do often in my business and is a skill with



Sunsets from the Club grounds are a beautiful thing. Looking towards Monroe, MI in midsummer.

which I am very comfortable.

As far as my business is concerned, I have run a small consulting firm for the past 15 years. My background is in chemistry and I focus on the formulation/development and testing of water based printing inks. I have a masters degree in polymer chemistry from Lehigh University. It took me 16 years on and off to get that finished up — starts and stops and marriages and moves and illnesses and life changes made that an arduous process, but I can say it was very worthwhile. My approach to life is one of promoting education and awareness wherever I go. I see myself both as a student and a teacher, and I get great satisfaction from bringing knowledge, supplies, motivation and support to areas/people that are in need of such. “Do what is necessary” says the I Ching. I hope my life is an example of just that very thing.



Me and my best friend