

Time tracs

by Jim Ingram

My last column on Armada Island nurtured the idea to do a series on the island of Lake Orion. This column explores the history of Romance Island. Future columns will cover Bellevue and Park Island and perhaps others.

The island is located adjacent to Victoria and Bellevue Islands in the northwest section of the lake. Today there is a year around chalet-like home on the island.

The people use an air type boat (it rides just above the surface on a cushion of air) to go back and forth to the shore lot on Bellevue Island. This type vehicle is critical in the early spring and late fall with the thawing and freezing of the ice.

Romance Island does have a very romantic though tragic history. It started in the 1880s when half the island was purchased by the Dendel family and the other by the Hartman family. The island at one time was call Dendel Island.



Addie Dendel and Louis Hartman began dating and had the castle-like cottage built in 1886. They truly had a long courtship which lasted over 20 years. They eventually married -- thus the name Romance Island.

Tragedy struck just four years later when Louis Hartman was killed when his car was struck by a train at the Indianwood crossing.

After her husband's death, Addie invited her twin brothers Jacob and John to summer with her on the island. They had built a cottage at 520 West Longpoint in 1885.

Addie probably died in the '1920s. She left the island to her church hoping that it would be used for religious retreats. Instead the church sold it.

When I was growing up on Lake Orion, we always referred to Romance Island as Castle Island because of the cottage. It was large for a LO cottage with a wide stone and pillared veranda around three sides.

There were several sets of French doors opening into the cottage. Wide stone steps with a gracefully curved railing led from the veranda to the yard below. These steps are all that remain of the castle. They can be seen leading up to the deck of the current home.

The second floor had several turret like outcroppings with rather flat roofs. There was also a round tower with windows that went up three stories. There were several stained glass windows, as well as leaded beveled glass doors.

Inside, the living room had a cathedral ceiling with a balcony running around three sides of the room. At one time the island sported its own water tower separate from the cottage.

The cottage often housed prominent evangelists such as Billy Sunday and Rhodeaheaver. These evangelists were "stars" of the chautagquas held in the auditorium on Bellevue Island in the early 1900s.

Much information about the early history of Romance Island came from Evelyn Dendel. Her late husband, Earl "Bud" Dendel's family owned the island. Mrs. Dendel still lives in the cottage built by Mr. Dendel's great uncles.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the island was owned by Lare and Ann Wardrop. Lare was first chair oboist and English horn soloist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. They used it initially as a summer home.

After a divorce, Ann winterized the castle and lived there year around.

The castle and island were largely abandoned in the 1970s. The castle was repeatedly vandalized during this time. It was destroyed by fire in the late 1970s.