

Time Tracs by Jim Ingram

(This is second in a series on Sibley Hall.)

The interior of the house has changed considerably over its 97 years. When the Stewarts lived there, the main entrance was on the lake side with the back entrance on the north.

On the main floor were the living and dining rooms, a music room and sunroom. At the rear was the kitchen and a hallway that led to the maid's room, a bath and the door to the basement.

There was a "summer kitchen" which was a latticed section of the veranda. It was entered through the pantry and had a large metal sink with a pump to supply water.

These kitchens were used during the summer months for cooking to avoid heating the main house.

In the kitchen was a large electric stove, a Kitchen Aid mixer and a dishwasher. They had an enormous icebox, metal lined, that was adjacent to the kitchen.

The sisters also mentioned a Hoosier Cabinet which was a food preparation cabinet with enameled working surface, lower drawers with upper storage for flour with sifter, sugar, etc.

The neighbors had a washing machine which Mary enjoyed watching operate. The Stewarts sent their laundry out.

They had one of the first radios and listened to the Detroit stations for the news and Sunday church services.

On the second floor there were five bedrooms and a bath. Three of the bedrooms opened on the second floor veranda. The Stewarts entertained many houseguests from Detroit, England and Australia.

The porch or veranda in this case was a central part of early Lake Orion cottages. Bowdon Hall had over 1,000 square feet of veranda running on three sides of the house with 2,400 square feet of living space inside the house.

The Stewarts, like the summer families, spent much of their time on the veranda. The girls liked to roller skate on the lower veranda and watch the lights and fireworks of Park Island from the upper veranda.

One of Mary's fondest memories is of her father mixing late afternoon cocktails in a silver cocktail shaker on the lower veranda.

The Stewarts had a boathouse with a swimming dock on the west shore of the property. Inside was housed "the Nancy," the family launch.

It was named after Mrs. Stewart and the family brought it to Lake Orion from the Detroit Boat Club on the Detroit River.

Mr. Stewart raced "the Nancy" in the speed-

boat races on Lake Orion. Their neighbor Frank Herte also raced his boat, "the Lightning," a torpedo shaped racing boat.

Mary and Elizabeth were allowed to use the canoe and rowboat and they rowed and paddled all over the lake.

The sisters seemed to have enjoyed their childhood years spent in Lake Orion. They swam and boated in the summer. In the winter they mentioned skating and ice fishing.

They built a slide and ski jump that ran from the road over the high breakwall onto the lake. That winter they learned to ski.

"What a great place to raise kids," Elizabeth remarked.

Also recalled was the harvesting of ice as soon as the lake was thick enough and the delivery of mail by boat in the summer. They had a picture of their dock with the mailbox at the end.

In the winter, they walked to the post office in the village to pick up their mail in Box 100.

Interestingly the family didn't participate in many of the resort facilities or activities. The girls weren't allowed to go to the amusement park on Park Island or ride on the excursion boats around the lake.

The Stewarts didn't frequent the dining room of the Bellevue Hotel as many of the more affluent summer residents did. Nor did they attend the church services or concerts at the auditorium on Bellevue Island.

The Stewarts' lack of involvement with the resort may have been because they lived on Lake Orion year round and were more oriented toward the village.

Mary and Elizabeth attended the Baptist Church (now the Union Church on the northeast corner of North Broadway and Church Streets) and the Sunday School there.

The Baptists used full immersion baptisms and the Stewarts allowed the church to use their lake shore for this purpose. The family would always leave at these times. However, Mary said once she and Elizabeth did watch the goings-on from the upper veranda.

The family did attend the Galilean Services around the lake. These were church services held on the lake shore at dusk, usually at major landings (docks). The service was conducted from the dock with people sitting on shore or in their boats.

The Stewarts would go by either canoe or rowboat (motorboats not allowed) and sing hymns as they rowed home over the lake after the service.



Visiting Sibley Hall this summer were (left to right) were Mary Miles Teachout, Nancy Sanford Hughs, Mary Stewart Miles, Elizabeth Stewart Sanford, Pat Sanford Turner.