

Warren R. Smith Remembrances of Early Days in East Leland

Transcription from the *Leelanau Enterprise-Tribune* by Bert Thomas

The following account of early days in East Leland was published originally in four installments in the *Leelanau Enterprise-Tribune* in 1972. I combined them to make the account easier to read. The introduction to the series states that the accounts were provided to the paper by Alden G. Smith from writings by his father Warren R. Smith done in 1954. It is clear from the context that Alden included some of his own recollections interspersed throughout. It is not always clear where Alden inserted sentences or paragraphs but wherever there are parenthetical comments or the text mentions "Father" or "Mother" I presume those are Alden's additions. I received the original four articles in PDF form attached to a forwarded email that was originated by Gil Wheeler. So, thanks to Gil for sending these around.

The combined articles, below, are preceded by an editorial introduction to the first installment in the paper.

Editor's Note: The following is an account written by Warren R. Smith, long-time summer resident of Leelanau County in 1954. It was submitted to the *Enterprise* by his son, Alden G. Smith of Rt. 1, Lake Leelanau and will be carried in several installments in the *Enterprise*, of which this is the first installment. It is a partial history of some of the residents and resorters that have come to Leland since 1908.

I first went to Leland in the summer of 1908. Anything here antedating that is hearsay; anything later is mainly of my own knowledge.

The first resorters to come to East Leland in any numbers were a group from Lake Forest, Ill. They were the Bridgmans, the Burnaps, the Atkins, the Stanleys, the Locys and the Goulds. (Right here it is interesting to note that over half of these "settlers" were teachers of college level, a factor which influenced, for the better we hope, the social life and general background of a rather fine group of families. It is also interesting to note that most of these people were relatively young, in their early stages of productive life and with children mostly under ten years of age).

I think I have heard that there was at least one other family in the early years but they had some sort of a row with somebody and did not come back. They camped along the shore from the von Hofsten place to the Atkins. The Stanleys camped where my sundial is and the Locys where my camp is. They rented camping sites from Mr. Porter for five dollars per season,

which included the privilege of storing their tents in his barn for the winter. They built their own tent platforms. (In the earlier years there were tent platforms where the Truebloods, Owens, Smiths, Atkins and Bridgmans and Burnaps were located. Most of the people called their places "camps" and they literally were camps. It is natural that the term has stuck though the description has changed. Prior to our coming, the Bridgmans camped where the Owens now are.)

In the summer of 1908 I had to go to California & Caroline (Mrs. Smith) rented a tent and platform for herself, children and maid from the Atkins. Her sister Katherine spent part of the summer with her. They were located about where the Atkins building nearest our house is. There was not much camping along the shore after that.

The Locys built the Johnson house that summer. The Goulds continued to camp until they sold to the von Hofstens about 1912. The Stanleys had built the present Shoaf house on the hill. The Atkins had just built. A family by the name of Rogers from Aurora or some town west of Chicago had built the Trueblood house, later destroyed by fire. Dr. Long had built the house repaired and enlarged by Fred Shoaf Jr. I do not know whether the Linebargers were tied up with that first group or not, but they had already built. Mr. Warden had built on the point. His building was supervised by Theo Stanley. The Linebarger and Warden places were a part of the Drow farm which is now the Behymer place. The Drow farm may have included some of these (properties) north of Linebarger. All of the rest mentioned and down, I think, to the Russells, was part of the Porter place. I do not know where the line between Porter and Blackwood was. Blackwood included Russell and some others.

Mr. Porter had homesteaded in the 60s (?) and was a highly respected citizen. He had died before we came but two of his daughters were living on the place the summer that Caroline camped. The place was sold the next year to Alvin Smith whose wife was a sister of Ed Steffens and Mrs. Weller. They lived there a few years and then it was vacant until Richard Steffens, Willard's father, moved there. Mr. Porter may have sold a few lots directly to occupants but he sold most of his Lake Leelanau frontage to Mr. Best (Maro the Prestidigitator) who bought a lot of other lake frontage, and most of us bought from him or his widow.

A Miss Waterman, relative of Rogers, bought the Owen property and Wilbur Owen bought from her. I bought 100 feet of frontage from Mrs. Maro the first summer I was there when I went up to bring Caroline and the children home. I started building the next summer and later bought 90 odd feet between me and the Owens from Ed Steffens.

There were no buildings between the Atkins and the Blackwoods until after 1920(?). I do not know where the line between the Porter place and the Blackwoods was so I do not know from whom the residents along that stretch bought. It is all a matter of record.

(Except in the old records there is scarcely any trace left of the Porters. However, I believe that the area between the Owens and Truebloods is still identified as Porter's Landing. Though it is not commonly known, the road through this area is a public right of way or easement to the lake, and it formerly terminated in a large permanent dock where the steamboats could land. In about 1916, there was a cloudburst which washed out the gully and the dock, leaving the present little sand peninsula. I can remember that this same storm washed out portions of many of the roads in the area and created a temporary lake in the field in the SE portion of Steffens farm. I have heard that Porter's Landing was at one time on the principal thoroughfare between Suttons Bay and Leland, the road via Provemont being too swampy for wet-weather travel.)

Mr. Blackwood came to Leland as a teacher in the school. He found that there were forty acres on the east shore of Lake Leelanau that none of the farmers had thought worthwhile to acquire; so he homesteaded it. He built and occupied the house later acquired and remodeled by Mr. Prichard. He had a wife, two sons Herman and Leland and a daughter. The wife and daughter were sick with tuberculosis and he took the whole family south for the winter. I do not think the wife and daughter ever came back.

We all travelled by boat (from Chicago) in those days. The dock at Leland lasted a year or so longer (after our advent), and then they used to land at Glen Haven and even at Suttons Bay. (The passenger steamers continued on Lake Michigan for many years, covering most all of the commercial or tourist centers. As late as 1929 they still operated to Glen Haven, Traverse City, Charlevoix, Mackinac, etc. They were the delight of small children and the dread of harried mamas. They were large enough to get lost on and arrived at all hours, usually allowing but a few minutes to disembark at some odd hour. Some of them were side-wheelers – I believe the SS Manistee was one such. The big dock at Leland had been an institution for years but was torn out by the ice sometime before World War I. It had been used as a principal loading point for lumber and products, fish, farm produce and even, many years back, pig iron. (As I recall, our first and several trips to Leland were made by boat but after the dock disappeared, rail became the more practical.)

Mrs. Hill first lived in a cottage which is now on the Roberts property. After some years she bought the Mitchell farm from the Blackwoods, after Mr. Blackwood's death I think. She then built her present cottages and sold the farm to the Mitchells in about 1940. Mr. Blackwood spent several seasons with Mr. Harrison in Chautauqua work and there acquired the present Mrs. Blackwood. The Behymers also were Chautauqua workers.

The Barker place was built by an Indianapolis minister named Owen or Owens. He sold to Professor Rawles of Indiana State who in turn sold to the Barkers.

The Bridgmans and Burnaps each bought 500 feet frontages. I do not know from whom. The Bridgmans and the Burnaps had each built before 1908 semi-camps – tight wooden kitchens and roofs but with only canvas walls for the living quarters. The Burnaps sold the north half of their lot to the Hoges (in the mid-twenties) and finally Mrs. Burnap sold the rest to the Scheyers who remodeled the house in the thirties.

Mr. Bridgman built what he called his south camp to rent for a season to a ministerial friend of his, Parson I think the name was. He later sold this to the Roberts in the twenties who have done much additional building and also acquired what they call their south camp, from a Mr. Mall, a Lutheran churchman who was suspected of German sympathies and never came back after the First World War. (This was the property used by Mrs. Hill.)

I think that all the other places have been built lately enough so that there are plenty of people who remember about them.

When we first came to Leland there were no cars. Land transportation was by horse and buggy. The Bridgmans kept a horse but none of the other resorters ever did. The horse was none too gentle but Mrs. Bridgman used to drive it.

(Getting to East Leland was something of a problem. Our first trip in 1908 was from Chicago to Leland by steamer and then across Lake Leelanau by a launch run by Mr. Blackwood. It was rather cold and rainy and it took Mr. Blackwood several hours to get the engine started so we arrived well after dark, not knowing just when, where or if we were expected. I can remember myself as a crying brat who didn't contribute to Mother's equanimity under the circumstances.

(After some years the trip was usually by Pere Marquette or boat to Traverse City, by Manistee and Northeastern to Provement and by wagon or boat to East Leland. Though we usually arrived in TC shortly after dawn, the M & NE might not start much before noon and was usually delayed up to two hours at Solon, where it connected with the branch and train to or from Frankfort and Manistee. Four hours from Traverse City to Provement was not unusual. Alternately, we might catch the SS Leelanau at Fouch, which was a good proposition since it would set us down at our doorstep or a nearby landing. The M & NE trains had bright red plush seats which would transfer their colors to any perspiring passenger or if rain had entered. A standard diversion for small boys was to try to stop the train when the conductor wasn't looking by setting the hand brakes at the end car; frequently a successful operation on the hills.

(Travel in winter presented the same problems except that the lake was frozen and frequently the rail road tracks were snowbound. On one occasion Father walked through the drifts from Hatch's Crossing, probably 17-18 miles, because the train was frozen in at Northport.

(The early motorboats were rather crude affairs, mainly open boats with one or two lugger engines whose exhausts could be heard the length of the lake and of whose starting there was always doubt. Most of us could identify 90 per cent of the boats on the lake by sound and Mother generally knew long before he arrive that Father had quit fishing and was headed home.)

The first year we were on our own place we had only a rowboat to bring supplies from Leland, transport washing and do similar errands. I have rowed to Provemont and back more than once; once to the Ver Snyder place below fountain point. Later we had a motorboat which I bought second hand in Saugatuck for \$100 and found a fellow to run it up here on the big lake for the trip and his fare back. (What Father omits to say is that he built or helped build the rowboat and that its excellence is attested by the fact that it is still in use after 45 years. Many of the earlier residents built their own boats – the two cedar “Adirondack” canoes built by Mr. Atkins being superlative craftsmanship. Mr. Lederle, who for years was with the Leland Mercantile Co., built some nice little sailboats, double enders of so called “Alaskan” rig, and Mr. Stander built several motorboats which were the pride of their owners.)

For many years, the steamer “Leelanau,” Captain Ver Snyder, made regular trips from Fouch to Leland, stopping at any suitable dock along the way. (There were large or deep water docks at the Linebargers, Porters Landing and, of course, in Leland and Provemont.) She would come up into the north part of the lake and if there were no suitable dock, lower trunks and similar freight over her side into a waiting rowboat. I have heard that she was first designed to tow logs from around the lake to the sawmills (in Provemont and earlier in Bingham). Legend had it that her boiler had blown up at an earlier date and had killed a couple of hands – perhaps it was only legend but it bred a proper respect in the small fry. The children of the era grew up to the tune of “Here Comes the Leelanau, the Leelanau, the Leelanau, etc”. There was another steamboat on the lower part of the lake – not as large or as grand as the Leelanau with its yearly coat of white paint and black trim, but still a steam boat. I think it was called the “Volturno” and was a tugboat.

Jacob Swartz Sr. had a somewhat smaller boat, powered, I think by gasoline and in which he would transport freight and passengers from Provemont and perhaps from further down the lake. (At the same time, Mr. Swartz operated the old Riverside Inn in Leland and his boat was a natural adjunct to the Inn, which was the principal hostelry for Leland visitors. The Riverside Inn burned about thirty years ago.)

The first summer that Mrs. Smith was there, Mr. Blackwood had a launch which was available for passengers. (It was typical of many of that vintage: schooner stern, large open cockpit, a canvas enclosed canopy with tarred roof and an engine which was huge, dirty, smelly, loud-

voiced and about 4 mule-power and with a make-and-break ignition which made bad words and broke the back and heart.)

That first summer was the one when some farmers from down the lake were angered at the height of the water was kept and blew up the dam with dynamite, lowering the water six feet, more or less. There was water only in the channel in the river and the beaches along our shore were 50 more feet, as I remember from dragging a heavy farmer's boat out over the beach.

In those first summers there were farmers who would make regular trips with vegetables, fruit, eggs and butter. There was no milk delivery. The children used to have to make regular trips up to Weilers, or some other farmers for milk. Our butter came for many years in big crocks from Spinniken's Brothers and Mrs. Richard Steffens was often a fine source of vegetables and bakery.

Trips to Leland or Provemont were made at regular intervals for staples, hardware and all. We had much more fish from both the big and the little lakes. As I recall, at one time a good sized lake trout or white fish was worth about 25 cents and there were about two dozen fishing boats regularly stationed in Leland. That was before the advent of the eels.

Fishing in Lake Leelanau used to be quite productive. We could always get plenty of pan fish and it was a poor day when Father did not bring home one or more larger fish. There used to be many more pike than bass and almost as many dogfish as either. The dogfish were reputed to be inedible and father used to put them in his garden or orchard for fertilizer.

In general the fishing was probably much better in the lake 30 years ago. I can't see that the trout fishing in the streams has changed much. Limit used to be 15 fish and was seldom attained. Though the limit is now only 10, I have caught that many in a few hours recently and I probably am not smarter than I was some years ago.

Our house developed rather slowly as I did most of the work myself. I would occasionally pick up a day's help but the only steady help I had was Nathaniel Thayer and Matt Spinniken in building the bedrooms, two carpenters to build the front porch and part of the living room toward the lake, workmen installed the bathroom and built the small additions on the back of the bedrooms. The children all helped lay the composition shingles over the old wooden ones (about 15 years later). (This brief account hides much of what actually happened. Father was a plumber, carpenter, woodcutter, mason, boat builder and handy man for probably 30 years, if it can be said that he ever retired. He built the equivalent of an eight room house, 3 out of 4 fireplaces and all kinds of odds and ends of joining, furniture and ironwork.)

(At the same time Mother busied herself with countless bits of handiwork decoration and the usual things like winemaking and preserving.)

(Father and Mother were a good team, each complementing the other in many ways. The only time I ever heard Mother really cuss was when she hit her thumb with a hammer. (I think the Lord has forgiven her) but she generally had Father on hand for using tools. At the same time Father undoubtedly was helped by Mother's eye for color and general sense of proportion. Any visitor at the Smith or any other camp was apt to be put to work. When one remembers that there was no electricity, no automobiles and few servants he will realize that everything was on a subsistence level with the folks living in the ways which were the most fun.)

The first summer I was there I built a room 12 x 24 which is now the main part of the living room, but which served that season as living, kitchen and dining room. We slept in tents. The next season I built the kitchen and bedrooms. I have forgotten how we slept that 2nd summer. Perhaps Caroline and the children went East and stayed until I had a shelter for them.

All of our drinking water was brought from the spring in the gully between the Owens and the Truebloods and other water by hand from the lake. No windows or screens, only shelters. All lights kerosene. Later we had running water from the lake for the sink and lavatories. Then came windows and a few screens and the bath room, but we brought all drinking water from the spring till we built the new house 1940 and drove a well. No refrigerators or ice-boxes. We all kept spring boxes in the running water in the gully and when there came a heavy freshet they and their contents would all be washed into the lake. Later we had a spring house on our own place. We had no fireplaces for a number of years but used to sit around an open fire out of doors till it was time for the children to go to bed. Last of all I installed electricity.

For over 30 years there was something building almost every summer. It was a little like Topsy but also somewhat in proportion to increased family needs and changes in the time times. Also, almost every summer we have had one or more guests, family or friends, and have always wanted extra bed space. Many summers, tents were used in addition to the permanent housing.

(Father did not get a car until 1925, the garage being built that year. The garage lean-to was built later. The garage was built largely of hemlock lumber from trees taken from the place. At one time there were numerous large hemlock trees on the place but in the early twenties a pest destroyed most of them and Father had the dead and dying trees cut for timber.

(The woods on Father's place contain some of the few first growth trees still standing in the area. Father has calculated that some of the maples are over 250 years old. When he first acquired the place there were perhaps triple the present number of first growth trees but storms and old age have decimated them. The largest may have been over three and a half feet at its butt. There are few larger trees in the area. There was a forest of first growth maple on Spinniken's place which was cut over twenty years ago, they being the last of the really large

trees I know about. Apparently there was large pine on our place at one time – we have found the remains of very large pine logs in digging foundations.

(I have heard that much of the large hardwoods were cut for charcoal as well as lumber. Before our advent in Leland there was an iron mill in Leland, probably because of the natural confluence of ore via the lakes and local charcoal. The beach at Leland used to be littered with slag from the mill – there are probably traces of it still.)

The road then ran down what is now the old path through (and at the edge of) the woods to about as far as the Nellist place where it came out on the lake shore. It ran along the shore to the Blackwood place where it dipped back to the main road (the present right of way). It was subject to washing by the lake and was so drifted by snow in the winter that the mailman could not get through. So the first or second summer I was there they laid out and built the present road through my and other fields and through the swamp back of the houses (circa Nellist) to join the other road at the Blackwood place. Only the houses were not there then. I have heard it said that the old road was only a road by use and had never been surveyed.

When we first arrived, and for some years thereafter, the road through the swamp at the NE end of the lake was corduroy. For many years none of the roads were much more than tracks through the sand. It was not until the early twenties that even gravel topping came into use and the first autos had a lot of fun with high crowns, ruts and deep sand. The little hill at Blackwoods place foundered many a car.

When we arrive there was a very well defined trail along the lake shore, said to have been an Indian trail from prehistoric times. There are many traces of it still extant. It ran right through our kitchen and it was not unusual to find somebody who was out for a stroll going through our kitchen. Also, I can remember that we came in for some criticism for having obstructed one of the old landmarks. Some of the strollers were doubtless guests from the Linebargers, who for many years had a summer resort-hotel, the only such enterprise in the East Leland.

(Almost every year mother expected to have visits from Indian women who peddled baskets and other Indian crafts. I believe that the Indians we saw lived at Gills Pier or above and were “transition” Indians, ones whose parents lived as aboriginals but who were themselves fast being converted to white man’s ways. If there are any left now, they must be pretty aged. I don’t know of any of them living on Lake Leelanau during our tenure. I have hear that they used to camp in the Lakeshore clearing north of the Hoges – not an improbability because of the presence of good water and shelter. The large birch tree in the same location is said to be the largest in the county and antedating any settlement. That would make it unusually aged for a birch but I can remember that it was still approximately its present size 45 years ago.)

In the early days there was much picnicking. It was largely circumscribed by transportation which meant that the places had to be accessible by foot or boat. The Gap was the most popular spot for young and old. We could get there by rowboat or with motorboats towing a string of rowboats. The Gap was said to have been an early attempt to cut a canal between the two lakes, the effort being discontinued when the difference in lake levels was observed. More probably it was merely for a road down to the pier which once stood there and sand was blown out by wind to present level.

The nearest picnic ground was what we called "mossy parlor", the area by the Nellists. We liked it for its good beach and shelter from SW winds as well as its actual mossy carpet.

There were many local "characters". However most of them were fine people and much liked. For many years the RFD man was Louis Balme of Suttons Bay for whom we all had a warm spot in our hearts. Ed Steffens was a fine builder and his sound workmanship is evident in many of the cottages. He was also a good friend and helped Father with the stone house as much with his head as his hands. Much of it was built with Father and Ed making pictures on a scrap of lumber rather than following blueprints. In a slightly different type, Claus Alpers was the delight and bugaboo of all small children – he could drink and cuss and scare us kids but was always kindly. Joe Vallee, Hahnenberg and others in Provemont were always helpful in supplying our wants and attending to drayage when needed from the RR.

Largely because of the lack of transportation, our society was rather close knit, pleasures very simple and shared by almost everybody. Favorite diversions were baseball in the Owens lot and hide-and-seek in the Owen's place (then Waterman) with the big green stone in their garden as goal. With rather infrequent changes, most of the families grew up together. In 1918 the roster might have included:

Mr. and Mrs. Bridgman, children Don, Ray, John and Margaret; Mrs. Hill and daughter Helen; Mrs. Atkins and children Eleanor and Margaret; Mr. and Mrs. Smith children Anne and Alden; Mr. and Mrs. Bacon children Alfonse, Ernest, Charles and Maide, one season only (in Truebloods house); Mr. and Mrs. von Hofsten children Frances and Polly; Mr. and Mrs. Locy children Francis; Mr. and Mrs. Rawles children Cotton, Halle; Mr. and Mrs Shoaf children Fred, John and Richard; Mr. and Mrs. Linebarger children Charles and Gwendolyn.

Music was always a part of the life in East Leland. Few, if any, of the homes lacked a piano and most of them had someone who could at least play tunes. While there were no virtuosos, several people had fine voices – Eleanor Atkins, Jimmy Roberts, John Bridgman have allhelped set a musical pace above average. Long before the weekly Sunday night "sings" at the Country Club in Leland there were regular tune-ups in East Leland, generally from one home to another rather than in a set location. Almost any quiet summer night might also find a group of canoes

or boats in a mid-lake song fest and song was usually inseparable from any picnic. It may be that the absence of radio was a natural stimulant to the latent talents of many. From time to time there have been more temporary cottagers who have been musically famous; we older people can remember Matzenauer, Claire Dis, the Kryls and, in our own crowd, Ernst Bacon. Now we have Alice.

The back country has changed little with the same farms in hands of sons and daughters of the earlier builders. When we first arrived the cash crop was potatoes and cherries and other fruits were little more than an added crop. However, by 1915 more and more acreage had been converted to cherries and after WW I they had been made the principal crop in the East Leland region. I can remember the first itinerant pickers seemed to be in evidence in the early twenties.

Father and Mother, together or separately, have visited Leland in late winter. They seemed to manage all right and to be able to keep warm without sleeping on the stove. On at least one occasion snow was drifted over the porch rail, which is 12-14 feet above the ground. Father tried making maple syrup but has found the trees on our land less productive than elsewhere – either that or it took too much firewood.

The “Eagle Highway” north from Lake Leelanau may be so called because of its elevation. However, the last nest of bald eagles in this region was across from Spinniken’s.