

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GROSSE POINTE

No one can say just when white people began to live in Grosse Pointe, but it was certainly two hundred years ago.

The Pointe was heavily wooded and much of it was swampy, a description that appears to hold good for most of the territory around Detroit in the early days.

It began as a farming and hunting community, the women doing most of the farming, the men the hunting and trading. All farms had water frontage, usually three hundred feet, and they ran back about a mile. The houses were all on the water, for water was the first essential, both for drinking and transportation. This resulted in neighboring houses being close to each other along the lake, but probably not for mutual protection as many people believe.

In the beginning there were no white women and there was a lamentable shortage of them until well after 1800. Indian brides became the order of the day, a practice which the French commandants encouraged, both for the safety of the settlement and to stimulate its growth. The French not only intermarried with the Indians but to a considerable extent adopted their ways of life, and almost from the start comparative harmony reigned.

Pontiac fought the English, Tecumseh--the Americans; but the great majority of the Indians around Detroit were at all times friendly to the French.

Just when Grosse Pointe received its name and what territory it included is unknown. The name was used long before the Americans took over in 1796, and it undoubtedly referred to the broad, flat point, which culminates at the Windmill Pointe Lighthouse. The French word "grosse" has a meaning that lies between grande and grasse, and seems well applied to this blunt point. Furthermore all of this Pointe lying east of Jefferson, the river road, was the Grand Marais (Great Swamp), and the names Grosse Pointe and Grand Marais were used interchangeably for many years.

The first clearings on the water front were largely devoted to orchards, and what fame Grosse Pointe enjoyed up to 1850 attached mainly to them. A Federal official visiting the Pointe in 1826 saw little else of merit except the view of the lake.

From 1850 to 1900 the lumbermen took away the woods and wealthy Detroit business men took away the lake front. The early settlers do not appear to have benefited greatly from either operation.

For half a century Grosse Pointe was Detroit's foremost summer resort. Bigger and better summer homes, with impressive French names and unlimited scroll-saw trimmings, blossomed on every

hand, and the road to the Pointe, although nearly impassable in wet weather, abounded in road houses famous for frog legs dinners and the relief of parched throats. The "Elegant Eighties" gave way to the "Gay Nineties," and electric railways began to make the Pointe really accessible; then came automobiles and a good road, and one decade saw Grosse Pointe become the year-round suburb of a rapidly growing city.

Subdivisions broke out like a rash, villages were organized, the Great War caused a lull, but the "Mad Twenties" more than made up for it, and present day Grosse Pointe with its thirty thousand people, schools, clubs and lake front parks came to occupy the wooded shores first seen by LaSalle and Father Louis Hennepin, when they christened Lake Sainte Clair two hundred and fifty-nine years ago.

The following is a brief chronological history of the Pointe. There are without doubt many omissions and inaccuracies:

1679 -- Lake Sainte Claire was so christened by Father Louis Hennepin, Chaplain to LaSalle, because their vessel, the Griffin, entered the waters of the Lake on August 12th, the feast day of Sainte Claire.

1712 -- The only warlike event in the history of Grosse Pointe is a battle which took place at Windmill Pointe in 1712, and which probably gave Fox Creek its name. There are two somewhat conflicting accounts but both agree on the following: The Fox Indians from Wisconsin established a fortified village within pistol shot of Fort Pontchartrain. Trouble developed between them and the French, and Dubuisson, the acting Commandant who had succeeded Cadillac, was able to gather quickly an army of 1200 friendly Indians. The Fox warriors, only about 300 in number, cut off as they were from food and water, after nineteen days of siege, took advantage of a stormy night to try to escape. The pursuing French and their Indian allies overtook the Fox at Windmill Pointe and a hard fought battle took place. Two hundred Fox warriors were killed and 100 were captured, who, however, promptly escaped. The women and children were taken back to the Fort, where their Indian captors were allowed to kill them at the rate of four or five a day. In addition to the two accounts of the battle that have come down to us, a great many Indian skeletons, tomahawks and other implements of war have been unearthed in the higher ground of Windmill Pointe near the mouth of Fox Creek.

1740 -- Burton's History of Detroit states that most of the river front had been taken up for farms, from which we may conclude that at least a part of Grosse Pointe was settled that early.

1758 -- The property now occupied by the Grosse Pointe Club was in the possession of Nicholas Patenaud.

1760 — The surrender of Detroit to the English caused many of the French settlers to leave Detroit and occupy their farms in Grosse Pointe.

1763 — Grosse Pointe farmers, because they were French and the Indians friendly to them, were able to continue living almost as usual in spite of the siege of Detroit by Pontiac.

1774 — Captain Alexander Grant, Commander of the British Navy on the Great Lakes, married Therese Barthe, a sixteen year old French Catholic of Detroit. Grant had previously served in the same army with Washington at the surrender of Fort Duquesne, and with Lord Amherst on Lake Champlain, where he had been detailed to Naval Command. Probably in 1775 Grant bought a 640 acre farm in Grosse Pointe and built a house known as "Grant's Castle," described in an early newspaper as being sixty feet wide and two hundred and eighty feet long, just south of where the unfinished John Dodge house now stands. Grant bought the farm from his brother-in-law, John Askin, and Askin later became the father-in-law of Elijah Brush, the founder of the well-known Brush family, which has also been so much associated with Grosse Pointe. Grant was also Lieutenant Governor of the county which caused him to entertain the great Tecumseh and other Indian chiefs at his Grosse Pointe estate, and he was a member of the Governor's Executive Council, which for many years ruled nearly half the continent. In addition to his family of one son and eleven daughters, who are described in an existing letter as the finest girls in this part of the country, Grant purchased from the Indians a three year old boy stolen from his home in the Ohio country. He adopted this boy and when he married Judith Campau, gave him the farm later owned by T. P. Hall. It is still a mystery how Grant was able to continue in Grosse Pointe after the United States took over Michigan in 1796, but he lived there until his death in 1813, a few months before Perry's victory on Lake Erie.

1775 — Gregor McGregor and Francois Millehomme, both owners of Grosse Pointe property, figure in the records as being involved in brawls in the City.

1789 — William Forsyth, whose sons later owned a large amount of Grosse Pointe property, petitioned for the sum of 381 pounds damages for a "ball alley" destroyed to make room for an extension of the Fort.

1796 — Detroit was taken over by the United States; this led to the establishment of a Land Board, which determined the ownership of all Private Claims out to Gaukler's Point.

1796 — The following families, still well known in Grosse Pointe, were already in possession of farms: Poupard, Campau, Socia, Rivard, Ellair, Vernier, Renaud, Allard, Kerby.

1798 — Father Gabriel Richard came to Detroit, and first

came to the Pointe as a visiting priest in 1800.

1805 -- A crucifix twenty feet in height, which had been carved by an Indian, stood on the bank of the lake just beyond Vernier Road. --

1819 -- Pierre Provencal retired from business in Detroit and built about where the Roy Chapin house now stands. He and his wife ran a small free kindergarten and school in their home. Part of this house still stands, but was moved in 1899 to the southeast corner of Lakewood and Kercheval, a block beyond Moross Road. Between 1825 and 1855 a log hut was built at the site of the Crucifix. This was the first St. Paul's, Catholic Church.

1826 -- Robert L. McKenny, a visitor from the East, wrote enthusiastically of the farms and orchards in Grosse Pointe, but quite unflatteringly of the farmers.

1846 -- All that part of Hamtramck Township beyond the Detroit Waterworks was organized into Grosse Pointe Township.

1846 -- Four acres on the lake, site of St. Paul's Church, was bought for \$200.

1846 -- Edmund A. Brush, wealthy owner of the Brush Farm in Detroit, built a summer home where the Truman Newberry house now stands.

1847 -- George V. N. Lothrop, a prominent lawyer and later American Minister to Russia, built a summer home and the first tennis court in the Pointe.

1850 -- The second St. Paul's Church was built on the site of the present one.

1851 -- The Detroit and Grosse Pointe Plank Road Company built a toll road with gates at Meldrum, Van Dyke, and just east of the present City limits.

1850-1860 -- Summer homes were built in Grosse Pointe by D. Bethune Duffield, where the present Rucker property is located, and by Francis Palms on the property recently acquired by the Candler. Before 1860, the brick house which still stands at the corner of Three Mile Drive and Jefferson Avenue, now owned by H. F. Wardwell, was built by Henry Seitz. This is the oldest brick house in Grosse Pointe.

1862 -- Theodore H. Hinchman, a leading merchant of those days, built where the Alger Branch of the Detroit Institute of Art now stands.

1866 -- Dudley B. Woodbridge, son of former Governor and

United States Senator William Woodbridge, built a year-around home where Lochmoor Boulevard is.

1871 -- Charles and Edward Moran of Grosse Pointe reclaimed the Grand Marais, about 900 acres of land between Jefferson and the lake and river, by throwing up a dike and using a steam pump.

1875 -- Joseph H. Berry, President of what is now Berry Brothers, Inc., bought a piece of lake front property (adjoining Alger Museum) and an old house which he used summers until 1882 when he built the large brick and stone house which still stands there. His property appears to be the only one of that period which is still in its entirety in the hands of the same family.

1875 -- John S. Newberry and James McMillan, later United States Senator, built quite similar houses on a property known as Lake Terrace and they owned together with their neighbor, Mr. Brush, a long dock where was moored the Newberry yacht "Truant" and Mr. Brush's yacht "Lillie." These boats were used partly for pleasure but were also much the best way to get to Detroit during the summer months. Driving a horse and buggy to Detroit in muddy weather was, at this time, likely to take between 4 and 5 hours.

1876 -- A non-denominational Protestant Church was built at the southwest corner of Kerby and Lake Shore Road.

1876 -- Rufus M. Kerby was operating the Grosse Pointe Post Office and a small store next to the Church. In 1893 the building was moved back on Kerby Road and was used as the first Village Hall until 1912.

1879 -- A bicentennial celebration was held in Grosse Pointe to commemorate the Christening of Lake Sainte Claire. It included a sailboat regatta, speeches, poems and songs.

1879 -- Grosse Pointe Village was organized and included only the property between Fisher Road and Weir Lane.

1880 -- Theodore P. Hall, a banker, built a home which he called "Tonnancour," with a frontage of 600 feet on the lake, where are now located the properties of his daughter, Mrs. Irvine, of Mrs. Altland and E. B. Whitcomb.

1882 -- William K. Muir, who was engaged primarily in the railroad business but was also interested in shipping and manufacturing, built "Otsikita Villa" about where the Waldo Avery house now stands. Otsikita was the Indian name for Lake Sainte Claire. Next to it was the cottage of Cleveland Hunt, one of Detroit's foremost attorneys, which had been built a few years earlier.

1882 -- The yacht "Leila," owned by a dozen summer residents, was used for a number of years to go to and from their

offices in Detroit.

1882 -- Henry B. Ledyard and Hugh McMillan built almost identical houses on property known as "Cloverleigh" and now occupied by the houses of L. D. Buhl and Robert Kuhn. Mr. Ledyard was President of the Michigan Central Railroad and Mr. McMillan was associated in business with his brother, the Senator, and John S. Newberry.

1882 -- W. B. Moran built his summer home "Bellevue" on the lake a little beyond Moross Road. Mr. Moran was prominent both in law and manufacturing.

1883 -- The Sacred Heart Convent cornerstone was laid and the building was completed in 1885. The Sisters opened the first Catholic school in 1887.

1884 -- W. A. McGraw, one of Detroit's leading merchants, built a house which has since been incorporated into the one belonging to Percival Dodge.

1884 -- The Grosse Pointe Club was organized, purchased for either \$8,000 or \$16,000 the eight acres where the Dillman house now stands, and opened its club house in 1886.

1885 -- Henry Russel, who was already counsel for the Michigan Central, built a house which he called "Weeanne," and which stood where the Arthur Gardner house now is. The Gardner house was originally built by Alexander Lewis.

1885 -- Most of the property, between Ridge and Mack Avenues, in Grosse Pointe Farms, was a heavily wooded swamp which extended several miles north and south. About 1885 the County dug Black Marsh Ditch which drained the northerly part of the swamp into Milk River and the southerly part into Fox Creek. In the early days the Indians were able to use the two creeks and the marsh in times of high water as a canoe route which enabled them to avoid rough water on Lake Sainte Claire.

1885 -- The Plank Road Company was purchased by R. A. Alger, James McMillan, John S. Newberry, Hugh McMillan, M. S. Smith, A. E. Brush and George H. Lothrop, and plans were announced for a new macadamized road, new bridges, windmills to pump water into tanks at convenient intervals for road sprinkling, and shade trees on some portions of the road. The plans contemplated an expenditure of \$25,000, but were not carried out.

1886 -- John B. Dyar built "Beaurivage," which still stands unaltered at 65 Lake Shore Road.

1886 -- George S. Davis, executive officer of Parke, Davis & Company, had already owned for some years a summer home

on what he called the "Claireview Jersey Stock Farm." This property ran from the lake back to Mack Avenue and comprised the frontage now owned by the Sheldens, Torreys and Specks.

1887 --- A railroad to operate by steam or electricity was built by Calvin K. Brandon, Hibbard Baker, and Hoyt Post, out Jefferson from the Waterworks to Fisher Road, and another line known as the East Detroit and Grosse Pointe Electric Railway was built from the Waterworks out Cadillac to Mack, along Mack to St. Clair Road in Grosse Pointe and down St. Clair to Jefferson. Both lines at first used steam engines known as dummies, and neither showed a profit, but helped considerably in the development of Grosse Pointe.

1889 --- Grosse Pointe Village was extended south to Cadieux Road.

1890 --- Grosse Pointe Waterworks Co. was organized, and a pumping station was built at Moross and Lake Shore Road.

1893 --- An argument arose as to the sale of liquor in a roadhouse called "Termon't's," which stood on part of the present Frederick M. Alger property. It resulted in the organization of a new village, Grosse Pointe Farms, which took the old boundaries of Fisher Road and Weir Lane.

1893 --- The Protestant Church at Kerby Road was torn down and the property reverted to the donor, Rufus M. Kerby. A new church on the Lake Shore Road opposite McKinley was built on property given by Joseph H. Berry.

1894 --- "The McMillan boys" built a six hole golf course inside the race track at Hamilton Park, on the south side of Kerby Road.

1895 --- The McMillan boys, Howie Muir, Ben Warren and Cameron Currie built a nine hole course on Hendrie property just below Fox Creek, which was called the "Wanikin Club."

1895 --- John B. Dyar, in spite of considerable opposition from lake front property owners, acquired franchises and built the Detroit and Lake St. Clair Railway from Fisher Road to Mt. Clemens. Through the efforts of Senator McMillan and others, Grosse Pointe Boulevard was opened from Fisher Road to Weir Lane, making it possible to keep the railway off the lake front in Grosse Pointe Farms.

1897 --- The increasing popularity of golf suggested the reopening of the Grosse Pointe Club under the name of the Country Club of Detroit, and the construction of an eighteen hole course on leased property belonging to the Berrys, McMillans, Newberrys and Muirs.

1899 --- The present St. Paul's Church was first used for the funeral of Father Elsen, through whose efforts it had been built. It was planned to name the new church and the parish Sainte Claire's, but the necessary permission could not be secured from Rome.

1903 --- Hugo Scherer and Fred Wadsworth built a dozen frame houses on what is now Berkshire Place. They were rented to a succession of Detroiters who later built at the Pointe. Mrs. Henry Joy called it the "Cabbage Patch," after the then famous book of Mrs. Wiggs, and the name stuck until most of the houses were torn down.

1906 --- An orchard was removed and McKinley Place was subdivided from the Lake Shore Road to Grosse Pointe Blvd.--the first instance of subdividing land to sell to Detroiters.

1906 --- New bridges were built at Connors and Fox Creeks, and a wide brick pavement was built from St. Jean in Detroit to Cadieux in Grosse Pointe.

1907 --- The Village of Grosse Pointe Park was incorporated. It extended from a point 200 feet east of Alter Road to Cadieux Road, its present limits, but at that time ran from the lake to a line 500 feet south of Mack Avenue. Up to 1907 the Village of Fairview had included all that part of Grosse Pointe Township between Bewick Avenue, near the waterworks, and Cadieux Road. In 1907 all the lower part of Fairview was annexed to Detroit which necessitated the organization of Grosse Pointe Park.

1911 --- Village of Grosse Pointe Shores was incorporated and its limits have never been changed. One of the principal reasons for its incorporation was the necessity of a dependable water system--wells and windmills having been the supply up to that time.

1912 --- The Lewis and Weir Farms were bought by the Country Club and an eighteen hole golf course was built.

1912 --- A community house was established under the name of the Neighborhood Club. In 1927 a generous citizen of Grosse Pointe gave the Club 8 acres of land, and \$150,000 was raised through popular subscription to build and equip the Club as it stands today.

1915 --- The Grosse Pointe Country Day School was organized by Dan Altland, Fred Alger, and others, as a private co-educational school.

1916 --- Lochmoor Golf Course was organized and built its club house and an eighteen hole golf course.

1917 --- The Cottage Hospital was organized as a unit of

the Neighborhood Club because of the war time influenza epidemic, and in 1928 the present Cottage Hospital was built.

1922 -- The various Grosse Pointe public schools were consolidated into the present school district under the administration of the Grosse Pointe Board of Education.

1924 -- The Grosse Pointe Club was built.

1925 -- The Country Club's new club house provided the greatest fire in the history of the Pointe.

1926 -- The Parish of St. Claire of Monte Falco was established, and built a Catholic Church and School on property at Audubon and Charlevoix.

1927 -- The Village of Lochmoor, comprised of the hitherto unincorporated portion of the Township, was organized, and in 1934 the present Village Hall was built.

1927 -- The Grosse Pointe High School, after long delays and much argument, was built at Fisher Road and Grosse Pointe Boulevard.

1928 -- Grosse Pointe's first public golf course, the Renmor, was opened on property just south of the Lochmoor Club.

1928 -- The Detroit University School, a long established private school for boys, moved from Detroit to its present location on Cook Road.

1929 -- Black Marsh Ditch, which had come to be an open sewer, was put in a concrete barrel from Weir Lane to Detroit.

1929 -- The Grosse Pointe Yacht Club was built on filled in property at the foot of Vernier Road.

1930 -- Grosse Pointe Farms built a filtration plant and pumping station to supply water to its own residents, all of the City of Grosse Pointe and a part of Grosse Pointe Shores.

1930-1932 -- The Wayne County Road Commission built a new Lake Shore Road from the end of the asphalt pavement in Grosse Pointe Farms to Gaulker's Point.

1934 -- The Crescent Yacht Club moved from Detroit to the Henry B. Joy dock.

1934 -- The Village of Grosse Pointe was re-incorporated as a city.

1936 -- Grace Evangelical and Reformed Church was built.

1679 to 1938 -- a long procession of events and people, and not too vividly pictured in so brief a chronological form as we have used--priests, soldiers, trappers, farmers and Indians under the flags of France, England and the United States--canoes, horses, railways, automobiles--ribbon farms, lake front summer homes, the suburb of a great city--Grosse Pointe.