

8/25/2020

I wish I knew
the author of
this history
NW

ONLY YESTERDAY AT ISLE OF HOPE

It is hardly necessary to say that Isle of Hope in the 1920's and '30's was a far different place than it is today. There were nowhere near as many people living there. Life moved at a slower pace. If you were not a baptist or methodist, you went to a church in town.

Of course, there was a streetcar line which went up Abercorn to Habersham to 50th Street through Memorial Medical Center to Sandfly across the Herb River to Barbee's Pavilion. It rocked and swayed along at a fast clip and was the way to get home when no one could pick you up.

At night in the '20's through the open windows you could hear the roar of the rum runners. The Georgia coast now is favored by marijuana smugglers but then it was the landing place of many importers of offshore booze. No wonder the youth of that era grew up scotch not bourbon drinkers. The public landing at Gimball's Creek was used by both the rum runners and the local gentry who made their own white lightening on the hammocks and isolated islands cut off from the mainland and law enforcement officials. You could hear the muffled voices

and quiet engines as the cars were loaded and driven off in the middle of the night. It was a pretty exciting place to grow up.

During one afternoon crabbing several small boys went ashore on one of the hammocks to explore and stumbled on a small still. It was not in operation, but the copper worm and tanks looked attractive so they were dismantled and put in the bateau and brought home. Later that evening several of the local operators dropped by and asked that their "tools" be returned. They were put by the gate and covered with moss and had vanished when morning came.

Nature seemed very close in those days. One morning at breakfast in the middle of a thunderstorm there was a terrible crack of lightening. The chandelier wavered and grew dim and then brightened up. Everyone, after a panic, got up and looked out to see what had been hit. Everything seemed the same. When the rain let up, and a closer examination was made, it was discovered that Robbie, the old gardner, was lying dead under the big pecan tree. He had taken shelter there to avoid the rain. The bolt left a raw gash down the tree to the level of his head where it jumped to his body. The electricity had stopped his watch.

Several other deaths occurred which probably

would not occur today in urbanized Isle of Hope. A horse used around the place broke his leg and had to be put to death. There was a big bang, a lot of blood, and a big animal lay still. The other death took a lot more doing. A screech owl took up residence one summer in a tree by the front porch. It screeched all night for almost a week. Finally it was shot and shot at with a Colt 45. It's feathers were so thick, it was very difficult to dispatch.

To those below driving age a bicycle was a necessity. It was a mile to the bluff from Grimball's Point and almost two and a half to the DeRenne's at Wormsloe.

This was the longest, the scariest, and most interesting trip. The ride up the long dark avenue lined by live oaks with long grey moss waving menacingly in the breeze was pretty scary for 10 and 11 year olds. But there were all sorts of interesting things there. The tabby fort built by the colonists to keep the Spanish out. The earth works to keep out the Yankees. They both faced the back river. Skidaway Narrows was the result of the Corps of Engineers work during World War I to provide an inland passage out of the reach of German submarines. Then there was the library in a separate building filled with old books on Georgia. No one else had anything like that!

At the east end of the bluff were the McIntoshes and the Johnsons. The McIntoshes provided a golf course, touch football, swimming and sailing. They were the hosts almost every afternoon to all the boys. When they became too noisy or obstreperous Mrs. McIntosh sent the erring one home.

At the middle of the bluff lived Spencer Lawton, whose son is now D.A. Every now and then he had a city boy, Ben K. Armstrong, as his guest. Ben K. was not any bigger than any one else but he was a lot tougher and quicker. He would take on any and all challengers at fisticuffs and was the inevitable winner.

To the west of Spencer lived the Coolidge boys, George and Herman. But they were bigger and older and did not participate in the younger group's activities. Webb McTyre lived further down still, but he stayed in town a good deal. He was the best marble shooter when he was present.

One of the most distinguished men, and certainly the most influential, who lived at Isle of Hope then was Judge Arthur Solomon. He was not only the owner of the E & W Laundry, the grower of beautiful azaleas and camellias, but a County Commissioner and had been for many years. When the road acquired bad potholes and bumps, a call to Judge Solomon was in order.

A few days later the chain gang would arrive in their truck, disembark, and laughing and joking repair the road with a tough looking guard with a 12-gauge sitting on the shoulder of the road.

One of the most sophisticated establishments at Grimballs Point to young eyes at least was The Terrace, a place where every weekend there was laughing, singing and gaiety. It was owned by John Carswell and Hal Bacon. They entertained customers there. Even a golf course was provided. None of us knew why anyone would buy insurance from anyone else. Their customers seemed to have such a good time all the time.

An unusual event occurred one spring morning. The sun had just come up. There was a terrific outburst of barking from the dogs. The lady of the house got her 38 and her bathrobe and with two boys went out to see what the uproar was about. There on the bluff was Bob Roebing and his superintendent. He had come over to look at the dock and the garden. Several months before he had anchored his large schooner "The Black Douglas" in the Skidaway River behind Skidaway Island. He had decided that there might be a revolution in the industrial north brought on by the depression and that it was best to get out while the getting was good. He had determined that Skidaway Island provided a safe

haven. He had purchased Modena Plantation on the northern end of the island but while he was deciding what sort of a house to build he and his family lived aboard "The Black Douglas." He had taken this ship around Cape Horn and the wind and waves of the Skidaway River did not affect it. Later he would give a talk to the Cosmos Club about that trip.

He ended up building two very substantial docks on the island and one at Isle of Hope and ran his own boat service. He also had his own barge service that carried cattle and heavy equipment back and forth. He had his own fire system including brass hydrants and powerful pumps. And, of course, after a year or two he had built the metal circular cattle barn in which he later held a wedding reception for Ellen with bottles of imported champagne on ice in all the feeding troughs.

Another well-known family closely connected to Grimballs Point was a young army officer and his family who lived in one of the houses on our place - for \$15 a month - he was an author and wrote "Jack Armstrong The All American Boy". He was our member Pat Strong. His mother was the very smart, very demanding principal of the 49th Street School. His father left his boat at our dock and went fishing in it often. It was equipped with a canopy with a fringe and other

amenities which most fishing boats did not possess. When Pat went on to Cincinnati to be the District Engineer his script was put on the air. He said it was a lot of work to keep ahead of the program and he quit when he didn't need the income.

There wasn't any water system then at Isle of Hope and Grimballs Point. Everyone had his own pump. There wasn't any sewer system, everyone had a septic tank. In the early '20's people had acetylene lights and then their own gasoline engine and stored electricity in banks of storage batteries. Finally SEPCO came. But each resident had to pay to get the poles and wires to his or her house. Garbage was burned and what would not burn was thrown off the dock.

In those days Isle of Hope was still in transition from a summer resort to an all year round community. Henry Stevens and his family were among the last of the city people who came out to the bluff every summer from his house on 37th and Drayton. Then he would put his "Barnegat-Bay sneak box" in the water and all the year round boys would know summer had officially begun.

There was a lot of sailing. Jimmy and John McIntosh had a boat with concrete in the bottom which Jimmy always said was "light for its size." The Savannah

Yacht Club burned down in the early '30's so the Yacht Club met on the lawns of the McIntosh's and Snooty Backus and others to drink and watch the races. The dues were \$5.00 a year. Later the headquarters were moved to one of the buildings at one end of the General Oglethorpe (now Savannah Inn) pool.

The South Atlantic Sailing Regattas took place every summer beginning with three days of races in Savannah, then moving to Beaufort, Rockville, Charleston, and Wilmington on successive weekends. Each place was a great series of parties and coming together of people who had not seen each other since the year before. There were races from small boats up to 28-foot inland lake scows. Raymond Demere usually had the best and the fastest of these. When he would buy a new one he would take it out and see how far over it would heel before turning over. He was a hard driving skipper and required instant obedience to his orders. But the results were usually good and there was always that air of tenseness which made the boat tingle with excitement particularly when a maneuver was done just right.

It was a more relaxed job to be crew or skipper on the smaller boats. That may have been because the expectations were not as high and no one was that

hitchhike to Tybee." I don't know if the present police force has this forgiving an attitude.

Isle of Hope and Grimballs Point had a pretty good sized black community. They did a lot of fishing and crabbing and provided labor for the white people. The wage for the average day of 8 to 6 was \$1.00. Everyone thought Mr. Ford was a rebel rouser and maybe a Communist when he instituted the \$5.00 day ^{WAGE} in Detroit in the thirties. This shows rather dramatically how inflation has affected the dollar. There does not seem to be anything on the horizon that looks like it will stop this long-term trend.

After World War II, Isle of Hope changed rapidly. The Tidemans place was sold. Jimmy Richmond turned it into Wymberly. The McIntoshes and the Johnsons subdivided the land behind their houses. The street along the bluff was blocked off before Mrs. Theus house. A water system was put in. The County has now put in a sewer system. There is a road to Dutch Island. Judge Rouke's place now belongs to Allen Paulson. Neil Mingledorff's marina has come and is going. The condo threat came and was bought off. Barbee's Pavilion is gone and the terrapin's with it.

The place is not the same, yet it remains one of the most charming ^{friendly} places to live in our area and its tranquil air and beauty fortunately remain.