

Wick's Island

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As often happens, I will be contacted by someone asking for a bit of information about a onetime local resident or a piece of property that was once owned by a relative, and this request sends me down a rabbit hole of researching old records and newspapers. This certainly was the case with this article.

I received a call asking about information regarding with Wickes property. After a short conversation, my suspicion was confirmed. This was the family that built the island home now belonging to the Shultz family. Several years ago, I had the great pleasure of reading Rose Shultz's "Pie in the Sky", enjoying her account of her life in this home, but had often wondered about who built this and their connection to this area.

Edith Barton Clifford, the first Town of Horicon Historian and descendant of the original settlers in the town found an entry from Joel Barton's diary that he had sold the group of islands on the west shore of Brant Lake in the 1870's to a Mr. Wicks (for \$75) and that he built the unique house with a tower like addition on the largest of the islands. It was reported that the tower was used to furnish living quarters for the maids who worked there.

I have not been able to find a record of when the Island house was started but have found that in June of 1886 Walter H. Wicks arrived from New York and would soon take possession of his "Island Cottage". Later that month he arrived with his little brother and tutor to spend the summer. In July of that year the house was being painted a lovely yellow with a moss green roof. S.A Ormsby, a local builder, was the builder on record and reported that the home was nearly complete.

Over the next few years William H. Wickes, his wife and son as well as his mother and brother visited regularly, staying later into the fall than most summer visitors. He continued to have renovations and work done on the home. Reports were printed about the Wickes being a lovely family, enjoying hunting and fishing as well as being seen as dashing figures in the winter while skating on the lake.

William H. Wickes was reported to be a millionaire, born near Saratoga. As a young man he was said to have inherited a fortune of several hundred thousand dollars through the death of his father. He first went to work with the Standard Oil company and then conceived the idea of building refrigerator cars. Within a few years he had obtained his patents. Working out of Rochester, NY he organized the Wickes Refrigerator Company, being the president and general manager of this company and superintendent of construction of the Merchants' Dispatch Transportation. He traveled between his home on Fifth Avenue in New York City, the primary residence of his wife and sons and Rochester but spent up to three months of the year at his "Island Cottage". His work created the need for a great deal of travel, having offices in Chicago as well as Rochester. He was in Detroit on business in September 1892 when he died

tragically from a fall. Mrs. Wickes was here, at "Island Cottage" when she received the news of his death.

In newspaper reports, Mr. Wickes was described as 55 years old at the time of his death, gray-haired and the wearer of a mustache of the same color. His wife was described as a beauty of the same age, having been married for over 25 years.

There are few news items after this time, although there is one saying that the Wickes' eldest son had visited in 1893 and purchased property adjoining the grounds around Island Cottage. By 1904 Mrs. VanSlyke had purchased the property.

As so often happens, I marvel at the information that often comes so unexpectedly because of a decedent's curiosity, and the stories that are still out there for the searching.



Photo: balzertuc.com



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