

Manitou Islands Memorial Society

Manitou Memories

A Bernt S. Johnson Family History

Contributed by Linda Henry

According to MIMS' member Gerald Holmes (descendent of Islander Beatrice Thompson Holmes), MIMS has attracted the attention of nationally known singer Nancy Johnson. As it turns out Ms. Johnson is a descendent of well-known Islander Bernt Johnson. According to Gerald, Ms. Johnson has been researching her family tree and in so doing discovered her ancestor's deep roots to South Manitou.

Not surprisingly, once she made that discovery, she became fascinated by the Island itself. We can all relate



to that fascination! After doing further research, she decided that the MIMS excursion to the Island was the best way for her and her family to see the island of her ancestors.

Thus, Nancy Johnson and several other descendents of

Bernt Johnson will be coming to the area from all parts of the country to learn more about the land of their ancestors. The MIMS Board is very excited about this development and to be active participants, we have decided an article briefly detailing the history of Bernt Johnson's history on the Island is appropriate.

Bernt S. Johnson was born in Norway on September 3, 1858 to Bernt Sakarias Jonassen and Anne Severine Pedersdatter. When he arrived in the States his name was Bernt S. Berntsen, which he anglicized to Johnson (perhaps after his father's last name) for ease of pronunciation.

When he was just fourteen years old Bernt is said to have run away from home and secured work on an ocean-going schooner. For many years thereafter, he sailed the seven seas. "He was familiar with every port in the Old World...twice he was shipwrecked on the ocean."(from his Obituary)

When he was in his early twenties, Johnson came to the United States. He had family in Chicago and Whitehall and visited both. Soon he had a job sailing on the Great Lakes but would stay with his sister in Whitehall on his days off. As it turns out there was a handsome young widow from Norway by the name of Gesine Gabrielsdatter Thomassen. She was also in Whitehall visiting her sister in the early 1880's. Bernt and Gesine met and soon fell in love and were married in 1885.

From her previous marriage, Gesine had two sons Thomas and Theodore Thompson who had stayed behind in Norway when their mother came to visit Michigan. After their mother's marriage the two came to Whitehall to live with the Johnson family which now included a son, Sigvald, and shortly a daughter known as Gussie.

It isn't certain when the Johnson's moved to SMI. Their next son's birth (George, 1889) was not listed in Leelanau County. In 1890, they were able to purchase a large farm in the middle of the Island from the Miller family. However, their two youngest daughters were, Bessie in 1890, and Jessie, in 1892.

Anyone who knows the Island history or is descended from Islanders can see from the above brief description, a large part of her history unfolding. In addition to the Johnson children, Theodore and Thomas Thompson married Island sisters Tillie and Hattie Beck (daughters of August and Elizabeth Beck) and they born on the Island also raised their families on the Island. Theodore's descendents included Ralph, Irene, Floyd and Clarabelle Thompson. Thomas' descendents included Beatrice and George Thompson. Many of our members are descended from these families.



As in Norway, Ben made his living on the water. He continued to sail the Great Lakes and fished off his personal boat, the Swallow. According to Glenn Furst,

"A blind man could easily have known the fishing was good by hearing a loud voice (easily heard above the exhaust noises of the Swallow's noisy engine) singing a Norwegian sailor's song. It

went something like this---"Hon Slinger, Hone Dingler, Ha say. We sal the orga wer!" He told me that was a song Norwegian sailor's sang when working high up on the yardarms of a full rigger. It helped to relieve the tension and fear of falling."

Bernt loved his work and was successful. The family ran a beautiful farm and all seemed to be going well.

Unfortunately, in 1894 Gesine met a premature death when her child birth did not go well. This was a tragedy for the family as Bernt was still sailing the Great Lakes and was therefore often gone. Nonetheless, Bernt was strict and the



family farm was well maintained by the children who included Gesine's oldest boys Theodore and Thomas who were in their mid teens.

All of Bernt and Gesine's children left the Island at an early age. A couple said that their lives on the Island were so difficult that they were compelled to leave as soon as they could. Descendents of other Islanders have said the same thing. Despite its beauty, the Island's history was filled with tragedy causing its inhabitants much sorrow and suffering.

Today, we can visit the Island on a sunny day and experience only the best of what she has to offer us. By touching on her history and talking to and about her inhabitants and descendents, we can learn more about the other side of her

reality. We invite everyone to join us at our reunion and Island excursion to talk to this intriguing gathering of Islanders.



**From: the President's Desk,
Rhonda Kruch**

Hello fellow MIMS Member:

Manitou Islands Memorial Society is a heritage –bases group that is brought together by our desire to preserve the historic and cultural resources of North and South Manitou Islands with each of us having our own “special memory” and/or “connection” to the islands. The MIMS Board would like to thank each of our members for their generous donations that make our mission statement possible.

Some continuing opportunities for our membership:

1. Please remember to reserve the dates of Saturday, July 30th for our annual meeting at Empire Township Hall and Sunday, July 31st for our annual excursion to SMI.
2. Preservation of the August Beck Farmhouse will be happening from July 8th until the 16th with volunteers working on the main floor. An update will be given at the annual meeting and excursion.
3. Cultural landscape preservation will be happening from July 8th until the 16th as well on SMI. An update will be given at the annual meeting and excursion.
4. Linda Henry will be taking the lead with an interpretive display of SMI history in the Haas Cottage using the remaining funds from the Americana Grant. Volunteers are needed to help complete that work.
5. Paul Rocheleau continues to organize the preservation efforts with the exterior porches at the Theodore Beck Farmhouse. Volunteers are always welcome to help with that project.
6. The Port Oneida Fair is happening at the Park on August 12th and 13th. This is a great time for your family to step back in time and enjoy the Port Oneida Farms.
7. Board members are always needed. The offices of Vice-President and Secretary are up for election at the annual meeting. Officers serve a term of 2 years.
8. Newsletter articles are always welcome. Please share a past or present story of island memories.

9. Photos are always welcome as well. Please share historic photos of either island. MIMS Board members are also willing to interview members and scan photos to help preserve those memories for our newsletters or future website.
10. Please remember to pay your ten dollar (\$10) annual membership dues for the 2011 calendar year. Additional donations are also welcome to support our projects that help preserve the historic and cultural resources of Michigan’s Manitou Islands.

Contact Rhonda Kruch at 989-345-1778 or kruchr@sbcglobal.net for any additional information of MIMS activities. Thank you for your continued support!

The current MIMS Board Members are:

- President: Rhonda Kruch
Vice President: Paul Rocheleau
Treasurer: Linda Henry
Secretary: Jeff Reuteler
Member-at-Large: Lynn Roe
Member-at-Large: Gena Culver
Member-at-Large: Robert Beck

The newest member of the MIMS Board is:

Robert Beck—Member-At-Large

My name is Robert Harley Beck; the son of Harley H. Beck, the grand-son of Harley Beck,



and the great-grandson of August Beck. My grandfather Harley was born on the island in “1895” and lived with his parents until sometime around “1914-1915”, when he left the island to go to Michigan City, Indiana to join the Coast Guard. While working for the Coast Guard he met Grace Hendrick; who he married in Chicago, Illinois in March of “1916”. After the wedding they moved back to the island to live with August and Lizzie Beck. My father Harley Jr. was born in November of “1917”. Harley, Grace, and Harley Jr. at that time; lived with

August on his farm until sometime around “1920” I think. This is how I became related to South Manitou Island and what is stated above is more than what I knew of the island for most of my life. What was known is “your grandfather was born on an island in Michigan and your father lived there for a while”.

I was born, raised, and lived in Michigan City, Indiana most of my life; I now live in Chesterton, Indiana about 10 miles away. Michigan City is at the southern end of Lake Michigan and about 60 miles east of Chicago. I have spent most of my life working in manufacturing which should not be surprising for someone from northern Indiana. I have a son Jason Robert Beck that lives in Michigan City also. My life has been one of a working class person so there are not any major events in my life to be told.

I got involved with MIMS to find out as much as I could about the Beck side of my family and the island that my family got started on. In “2009” I spent a couple of days on the island around the August Beck farm taking in the family history and the magic of the Island, and have been hooked ever since.

A message from Dennis Steele, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Island Maintenance Supervisor

Some of the projects that are keeping island maintenance staff busy this summer are:

- Installations of a board walk to the cedars on SMI to take some stress off the surviving cedar trees.
- The interior of the USLSS on NMI is being scraped and sanded to remove the lead paint and then the structure is being repainted.
- The village barn on NMI has had the roof repaired and the south wall was completely rehabilitated with the wall shingles being replaced.
- Five of the buildings on NMI in the USLSS Historic District are being shingled.

All projects except the lead abatement are being completed by NPS employees.

In Memory of Zella Mae (Stormer) Morris

1933-2010

Contributed by Julie Morris and Lynn Roe

Zella was born March 6, 1933, daughter of Joseph and Ethel (Furst) Stormer. She passed away peacefully on December 12, 2010 in Wisconsin. Her husband Donald A Morris preceded her in death on April 16, 2008. She is survived by her sister Joanna (Stormer) Smith, daughter Julie Morris, son Dwight, and granddaughters Sarah and Laura.

Don and Zella were married June 21, 1958. They lived in Detroit where Zella was head nurse in pediatrics. After Dwight was born, she stopped working and became a

“stay-at-home” Mom.

They left Detroit and moved to Ann Arbor when Don worked at the University of Michigan. In 1971, they moved to Geneva, New York when



Don became Vice-President for Development at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. In 1977, they moved back to Michigan for Don to become President of Olivet College. He retired in 1992 and they moved to Glen Lake where they lived in various cottages until in 1993 they bought the one the family still owns today.

Don became President of the South Manitou Memorial Society in the late 1990s (later Manitou Islands Memorial Society). Zella took on the job of hostess for

the annual meeting. This was when Lynn Roe joined the MIMS Board as Vice-President and she learned the job helping Zella! Zella was always a gracious lady and a welcoming hostess. If you stayed in their home, there on your bed would be your towels and a cup!

As Don and Zella aged, they became more and more devoted to one another. Daughter, Julie, would spend her summers with them on Glen Lake. One day Zella shared that she and Don had decided to “re-up” their contracts! Don died shortly before their 50th Wedding Anniversary.

Don was a very successful man and he could never have attained that without the love and support of Zella. She took care of everything at home so he could focus on his work.

Zella was a very private person. Don’s work thrust her into a very public role which she did graciously. She organized receptions for hundreds with grace and aplomb, she will be greatly missed.

A Graveside service was conducted at 11:00 a.m. at Maple Grove Cemetery, Empire, Michigan on Tuesday, June 21, 2011 for Don and Zella. This was their wedding anniversary.

In Memory of Rita Hadra Rusco

Contributed by Neil Hodges

On May 27, 2011, Rita Hadra Rusco died in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she lived near family. When asked to write about Rita, my thoughts were of Rita and North Manitou Island, a place she dearly loved. Like so many others, I first met Rita on the island and it was through her book North Manitou Island – Between Sunrise and Sunset, that I learned about the history of North Manitou and Rita’s life there. Much of this memorial is based on Rita’s account of her life as published in her book. All who knew her have their own “book” of memories filled with experiences and conversations with Rita on the Manitou or at her mainland home. My memories are the never to be forgotten kind, and are Rita’s lifelong gift to me.

There is a small clearing on the east side of North Manitou Island that is the site of a cottage that was Rita’s island home during thirty-three of her fifty seven years of island life. As Rita shared in her book, the site of the cottage was on property purchased by her husband Jack Hadra and given to Rita as a gift in 1952. The view of the lake from the property is beautiful and provides a vantage point for sunrises over the mainland---a mainland that is illuminated with the gold light of the setting sun.

As chronicled in her funeral announcement, Rita was born on September 8, 1920, in Cleburne, Texas and

married

Jack E. Hadra on September 10, 1941.

In her book Rita wrote that the

following July, Jack accepted

employment with the Manitou Island Association and Rita as island postmaster. This was the beginning of her life as a North Manitou Islander, living on “island time” and as Rita wrote, where “nothing ever goes as planned.” Rita had two children, Nicholas and Rita Hadra, with young Rita being the last child born on NMI in 1947, who experienced life on the island during the Association era. As association activities and family needs changed, the Hadra’s lived in Muskegon and raised their family. In her book Rita painfully recounted that in April 1964 Jack Hadra died suddenly followed months later by the death of their son Nicholas. In surviving those experiences, Rita wrote of how she and her daughter were helped by friends and in particular one friend, Kenneth Rusco. Rita recounted how Ken encouraged her to construct a cottage on the property given to her by her husband. In 1966, the cottage became a reality and as Rita wrote: “I was delighted with my island home.” Rita and Ken were married in 1970, enjoying time spent on the Manitou. Rita wrote: “In



early spring, 1980, we returned to the island.” “We were alone, Ken and I; island population two.” Life on the island at that time included periods with only occasional visitors until the island officially became part of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. In the mid-1980’s, island life gradually changed with the influx of backpack campers exploring the island’s beauty. Ken Rusco died in July 1988 at their home in Muskegon, and Rita wrote that a few weeks later she returned to the island, accompanied by her family. Rita continued to spend summers on the Manitou until the summer of 1999, when her property became part of the National Lakeshore. During her years on the island she welcomed thousands of visitors, family, and friends and provided assistance to those in need. Rita loved to share her knowledge of island history and her island experiences with visitors. Rita lived in Grand Rapids after moving from Muskegon, and always treasured her time on North Manitou Island. Following loss of her island property to the Park, Rita visited the island a number of times, often accompanied by many family and friends. All who participated in those visits treasure the memory.

Rita was a strong advocate for preservation of the island’s history, and she is an important part of that history. In her book, Rita wrote of beginning her life



U.S. Light Station - North Manitou Island - 24 June 1906

on the island: “I couldn’t imagine that the Great Manitou would claim me---but even then, it was the beginning of a love for the island, that would become a part of my life forever.”

In Memory of Edna Marie Beecraft

Long time MIMS Member and South Manitou Island Visitor, Edna Marie Beecraft from Honor, Michigan, 76, lost her battle with cancer on June 11, 2011, with her family by her side. She was born in Elberta on November 25, 1934, to Edward “Monday” and Marie (Falk) Layman.

During the summer of 2008, Gwen Glatz and Rhonda Kruch had the honor of visiting with Edna on SMI. She



shared many fond memories of SMI as well as some wonderful pictures of the island’s past. Edna had a great sense of humor and loved to have a good time. This picture is a demonstration of that zest for life.

She married her husband of 57 years, Stdney W Beecraft on December 26, 1953.

Edna is survived by: her husband, Sydney W. Beecraft; her sons, Ricky and Kim Beecraft, her daughters, Cathy and Cindy Beecraft; and her grandchildren Alicia Beecraft, Joshua (Jennifer Taviana) Beecraft, Michael Blodgett, Rikki Barnard, Mckenzie Blodgett. She is also survived by her great-grandchildren which she referred to all as “Honey”, Amiah, Logan, Rhylee, Zander, Gage, Michael, Landon and Ryker.

Edna was an inspiration to her family. She will be truly missed by many.

Graveside services were conducted at 11:00 AM Monday June13, 2011 at Gilmore Township Cemetery at Elberta.

MANITOU ISLANDS MEMORIAL SOCIETY
ANNUAL REUNION/MEETING/EXCURSION
JULY 30- JULY 31, 2011

REUNION/MEETING, JULY 30, 2011 SCHEDULE:

- 10:00 A.M. **Arrival and visitation at Empire Town Hall**—Bring your photos and Island memories to share.
- 12:00 P.M. **Pot Luck Luncheon**—Main Entrees will be provided by MIMS. Please bring a dish to share for approximately 15 people and your own table service. Coffee, tea, lemonade and water will be provided.
- 1:00 P.M. **Annual Meeting**—What is your “Island Connection?”, President’s Report, Treasurer’s Report, Reports on Island projects, and Election of Officers.
- 3:00 P.M. **Final Announcements and Adjournment**
- 3:30 P.M. **Clean-up**-Volunteers appreciated
- 4:00 P.M. **Hall Closes**

SOUTH MANITOU ISLAND EXCURSION SCHEDULE:

JULY 31, 2011

- 9:15 A.M. **Recommend arrival and check-in time** at Manitou Island Transit’s ticket office.
Advance reservations are highly recommended to guarantee space and facilitate MIT. Extra parking fee applies and cars must be parked at remote lot. Phone MIT at 1-231-256-9061.
- 10:00 A.M. **All Aboard**—Miche-Mokwa departs for South Manitou Island
- 11:30 A.M. **Arrival** at SMI dock. Assemble on lawn in front of Coast Guard Station. Welcoming comments, lunches distributed. Eat lunch!
- 12:30 P.M. **Motor tour of the Island departs**—an \$8 fee applies for this tour.
- View the MIMS volunteer efforts at the August Beck Farm.
- 3:00 P.M. **Motor Tour returns to Village.** Members may
- Visit Island Museum
 - Lighthouse Tour-learn about the history of the light and view a breathtaking vista.
 - Walk the Island’s beautiful beaches and go for a swim.
 - Visit with your Board.
- 4:00 P.M. **All Aboard**—Miche-Mokwa departs the Island. Cash Bar available.
- 6:00P.M. **Arrival** at Leland dock and farewell for another year.

Save this schedule for the weekend of the reunion!

SPECIALPROVISIONS

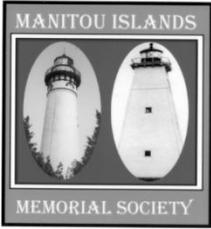
A PREPAID BOX LUNCH IS AVAILABLE FOR THE EXCURSION TO SOUTH MANITOU ISLAND AND INCLUDES SANDWICH, CHIPS, PICKLE SLICE, COOKIE, AND JUICE AT A COST OF \$8.00.

* PLEASE CHECK ONE: ___ TURKEY ___ ROAST BEEF ___ VEGETARIAN

CHECKS PAYABLE TO MIMS AND MAIL TO:

LYNN ROE
15150 EAST MICHIGAN AVENUE
GALESBURG, MI 49053-9689

WE MUST RECEIVE YOUR CHECK BY JULY 22, 2011



Manitou Memories—July 2011 Newsletter

MIMS

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Empire, Michigan 49630

President: Rhonda Kruch

Vice President: Paul Rocheleau

Treasurer: Linda Henry

Secretary: Jeff Reuteler

Member-at-Large: Lynn Roe

Member-at-Large: Gena Culver

Member-at-Large: Robert Beck

Just a reminder, the MIMS Newsletter (Manitou Memories) is published 2 times per year by the Manitou Islands Memorial Society and its contents may not be duplicated or reproduced in any manner without written permission by the MIMS Executive Board.