BAILEYS HARBOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

August 2025
Baileys Harbor Historical Society
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www.baileysharborhistory.org

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Enjoy our displays at:
The Toft House
8061 Highway 57
May - October
and
Historic Display Cases at:
Baileys Harbor
Town Hall
2392 Cty Road F

Cherry Time in Baileys Harbor
Preserving our History

This season we are honoring the local families that nurtured Baileys Harbor cherry orchards in the early days of growing this precious fruit in Door County. The Open House held at the Toft House, in conjunction with the opening of the Community Association's Visitor Center on Memorial Day weekend, saw nearly 60 people stop by to see the displays and enjoy some sweet, cherry treats. Historical Society members hosted an information table at the Door County Heritage Days kickoff event in June and also installed seasonal displays in cabinets in the Town Hall lobby. Displays at the Toft House can be viewed during Visitor Center Hours: Sunday, 10 am – 2 pm, Monday & Wednesday – Saturday, 10 am – 4 pm. The Toft House is closed on Tuesdays.

Baileys Harbor Cherry Growers included: Gerald Kita and his son, Jeff; Dan Krowas, son of Charles Krowas; Herbert Prust; Norbert Grenchik & his son, Norbert Grenchik, Jr. (Rocky Ridge); George Messer, sold to Jack Bacon (Kangaroo Lake Orchard); Ed Nordahl, sold to August Geiger (W. Kangaroo Beach Rd.); Clayton Moegenburg (Red Cherry Rd.); Donald Reimer (North Bay); Louie Peterson (Hwy A); Elton Krueger, sold to Harry Michelsen (Coyote Roadhouse); John Zettel (Hwy A&E); and the Gus & Martha Carlson/family (Deer Path Orchard).
Read the article about the Deer Path Orchard on page 3.
In 1980 the Northern Door Cherry Corporation was formed by the following growers: Lyle Hill, Gerald Kita, Albert Prust, Donald Reimer and Curtis Wiltse. In 2001, the owners were: Lyle Hill, Gerald Kita, Dan Krowas & Curtis Wiltse.

Donations

Since we published the May edition of the newsletter, the following individuals made donations to the Historical Society: Steve Makovec & Fred Pieper; Jim and Nancy Dickson and Rebecca Hawker in memory of LeAnn Despotes. In addition, visitors to the Toft House donated almost $100 through mid-July since the Visitor Center at the Toft House opened Memorial Day weekend. Attendees at the June and July programs contributed approximately $150. Those contributions will be used to offset the costs of video recording and editing the presentations so that they may be viewed online for those who are unable to attend.

The Historical Society is also not able host programs and events without the generosity of those who support us by providing the delicious refreshments. Those donors include: Katherine Jones, (Board member and chairperson for the BHHS hospitality committee); Jan Groen, Andrea Esau, and Kriss Schorer.

Ron Holden, a long-time staff member at the Toft House donated several photos, books and pamphlets about Door County lighthouse history that will be a welcome addition to the Society's collection.

Membership Update

We are happy to report progress in meeting our "25 new memberships in 2025" goal since May 1. Please join us in welcoming 5 new households to the Historical Society: Steve Makovec & Fred Pieper; Peter & Donna Steffen; Stefan & Joan Anderson; Curt & Pat Neudecker; Deb & Mark Schessler and Paul &Gloria Halverson.

We also thank the many members who have renewed their memberships in the last quarter. Your continued support is greatly appreciated.

For those of you who are lifetime members, please notify us of address and/or email changes. Please also let us know if you are willing to receive the newsletter via email.

Contact us with your updates at: info@baileysharborhistory.org

Thanks in advance for your help.

Board of Directors update

After more than ten years on the Board of Directors, Nancy Rafal stepped down recently from the Board due to health concerns. Nancy was instrumental in coordinating the three phase effort to design and manage the Baileys Harbor mural project that graced the north wall of the Nelson Hardware building. Nancy was also one of the smiling faces welcoming everyone to our summer history programs, and a thoughtful and caring decision-maker as the Board considered projects and issues during her tenure on the Board. Thank you, Nancy!

As we address the vacancy on the Board, created by Nancy's departure, the Board intends to present a minor revision to the Society's By-Laws to the membership at the annual meeting. The revision will more accurately describe the process used to fill vacancies over the most recent years and which has been effective in recruiting new members.

The annual meeting of the Historical Society will take place on Wednesday, September 17 at the Immanuel Lutheran Church. More information about this morning, breakfast event will be shared in the near future.

The Carlson Family and Deer Path Orchard

The Carlson family is celebrating its 100th anniversary of their log cabin on Chapel Lane this year. The Carlson cabin has been enjoyed as a summer destination on Lake Michigan for a century, but did you know that Gus and Martha also planted and operated an orchard in Baileys Harbor? We extend our thanks to lifetime Historical Society member, Gil Carlson and his daughter, for sharing the story of the Deer Path Orchard with us.

Deer Path Orchard

By Gil Carlson

In 1923, my parents Gus and Martha Carlson, who lived in Racine, Wisconsin, vacationed in Baileys Harbor. They loved the area and returned in 1924 and bought 200 feet of lakeshore property on what is now called Chapel Lane. They had a log cabin built on the land and spent summers there with family which included my older sister Blanche, brother Kenneth, and me. My father was born in Sweden and my mother's parents immigrated from Denmark so they added some of their Scandinavian heritage to the cabin's design.

In 1932, my parents purchased 33 acres of land about two miles north of Baileys Harbor on both sides of Hwy 57. They planted 3,000 Montmorency cherry trees and about 15 apple trees of different varieties. Because of the large amount of deer that traveled in the area, they named it Deer Path Orchard.

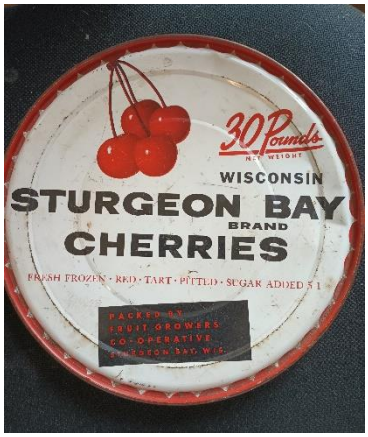
As time went on, the trees grew bigger and started to bear fruit. This necessitated more care of the trees including spraying before and after blossoming, before and after picking and pruning the trees. Picking was mainly done by local people including men, women, and children. The apples were shared with friends and family and not sold.

Back in the 40s and 50s, most families had only one car which the father typically used to get to his job. Therefore, my mother would drive to the homes of our orchard workers who needed a ride and then take them back to their homes at the end of the day. I remember meany times when she would have 8-10 people stuffed in her green '48 Chevy!

A special five quart black metal pail was used for picking cherries. The pickers had a belt around their waist that held the pail so they could pick with both hands. Three-legged wooden ladders were used to reach the higher cherries. Each picker had a folded card with numbers printed on both sides. When the pickers filled their pail and brought them to the check-in shack, they would get the card punched for the number of pails they had picked. One side of the card would be turned in and the picker would keep the other side for their records. A good cherry picker could pick four pails an hour. The price paid for picking varied from year to year and was around 10 – 25 cents per pail. At the end of the season, my mom would use the cards total up the number of pails each picker would be paid for.

The pails of cherries were dumped into wooden crates and a couple of women would look them over and take out the bruised cherries, leaves, twigs, and other things that didn't belong. The crates held about four pails of cherries. When filled, they were put on a trailer and taken to the processing plant in Sturgeon Bay.

At the plant you would drive onto a scale to have the trailer weighed. A government inspector would take 3-4 samples of cherries looking for ripeness, condition and unwanted items. If you were lucky and didn't have to wait long to unload, you would drive up to the large tank with cold water and your crates of cherries would be dumped in. This would keep the cherries firm and also wash the cherries. The leaves and twigs would float and be skimmed off. Your crates would be returned to you and you would return to the scale to be reweighed which would determine the weight of your cherries. Then we'd go back to the orchard to reload and do it again. I think we made three trips per day to the processing plant.



In the late 1940s, the Fruit Growers Co-op opened a receiving station in Sister Bay where Yacht Works is now located. This saved a lot of driving. Several years later, they also opened a canning plant on Old Stage Road and County Trunk ZZ just east of Sister Bay.

During World War II, there weren't many adults available to work in the orchards because many of them were in the military or working in the shipyards. For several summers, we had German prisoners of war do the picking. They would be brought to the orchard in the morning and picked up later in the day. The POWs got moved around the country to harvest different crops when they were needed. After the war, Jamaicans were brought to the United States to help harvest crops, including our cherries.

In the late 1940s, when my sister Blanche was high school age, she would get up early and make cherry pies. The stove we had at the time burned kerosene and the oven was only about 12 inches square. Blanche would sell the pies, along with quarts and pails of cherries at a roadside stand.

It took two weeks to pick all of the cherries in the orchard. When the picking was completed, the workers would be paid and my Dad would have a party for everyone. This included one or two fellows playing instruments, a keg of beer, food, dancing and a good time.

In 1954, my parents decided they had done enough and sold the orchard to another family. They harvested for orchard for a few years and later planted evergreens in place of the old cherry trees. The tall evergreens can be seen as you drive by the Deer Path Orchard area today.

Another Century of History

Four generations of the Krowas family have operated the Krowas Orchard on Logerquist Road for more than 100 years. The family originally grew cherries, but now, the focus of their efforts is growing apples, plums, and other produce. We extend our thanks to the Krowas family for their contributions to the Toft House displays this season. Sherry brought a variety of photographs, keepsakes and cherry tin covers (one of them pictured above) and shared information about the other growers in who operated cherry orchards Baileys Harbor. You can view the recording of the program about the Krowas Orchard, from June 2011 on our website: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4heZhcLiMKo

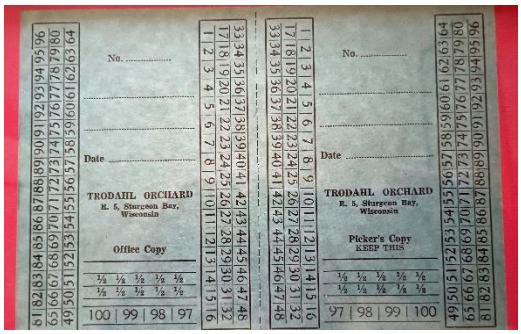
Cherry Picking Time

By Susie Bauldry

Growing up in Baileys Harbor there were certain times of the year that we looked forward to such as getting out of school by Memorial Day, summer freedom, going to the beach and picking cherries!

It was July and the cherries had turned red and we were ready to start pricing so we could earn some money. The first orchard where we picked belonged to Gil Carlson's family, here in Baileys Harbor on Hwy 57 (See the Deer Path Orchard story beginning on page 3.) I think my brother Loren was 13 years old, I was 10 and our baby sister, Diane was 3. Mom would put a blanket under a cherry tree for Diane to play and nap on. We were in the orchard by 8:30 am and left by 3:00 p.m.

All the pickers wore slacks and a belt that had a hook on it so we could hang our cherry pail on it. That way we could pick with both hands. When we got to the orchard, all the pickers were given a row to pick, wooder ladders and empty black pails that when full, weighted 9 pounds. In the center of the rows was the shed where you brought the full pails to be checked in. Our bathroom was a small outdoor, one seater outhouse, located on the edge of the orchard and which was furnished with real toilet paper.



The owners used a double punch card to record how many pails we had picked that day. (The image to the left is from an orchard in Sturgeon Bay). We were paid 25 cents a pail. The pails had to be full and clean. It was hard to carry the pail and not spill any cherries as we walked to the shed. At our age, we tried to pick 15 pails a day which meant we earned $3.75. Wow! Mom could pick at least 75 pails or more, depending on how heavy the cherries hung on the tree.

Finally, it was time for lunch. Mom always packed peanut butter sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, pickles and a big glass jug with red-Kool-Aid powder in the bottom. She would fill the jug with water at noon from the hose by the owner's house. We washed our hands under the hose, but never got the cherry stains from the juice off of them.

Although we were there to earn money, we did find time to find snakes, chew the pitch we picked off the trees and, on occasion, we even had time for a cherry throwing fight, until we got caught!

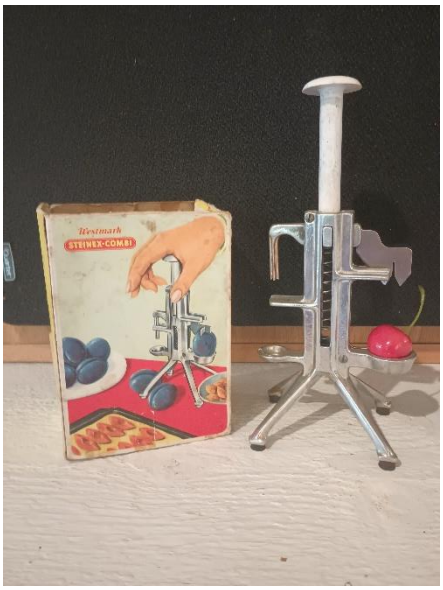
At the end of the season, we added up all of our earnings and planned how to spend it. Mom's rule was that we had to use some of the money to buy new school clothes, save some and then we could use the rest of our money for fun. The Door County Fair was after cherry picking time and that meant we could buy tickets for rides and throw rings to see if we could win a stuffed animal. The fair was the highlight of the our summer and it didn't take long to spend our money.

Looking back, even as young kids we learned earning money wasn't easy. We were up early, got dirty and sticky, as cherry juice ran down our arms. It was hot, and we didn't always want to do it. But God love Mom, we were being taught life skills, "if you want something, you have to earn it."

Thanks to a Swiss for Door County Orchards

Door County owes its success in planting orchards, in part, to Swiss immigrant Joseph Zettel. Early settlers farming the shallow, rocky soil here were seeking potential cash crops to supplement their income. Zettel, who arrived in Door County in 1855, discovered that the moderate climate and lack of late frosts made it possible to raise apple trees. By the 1890s, Zettel had 45 acres of trees producing 3000 bushels of apples annually. Zettel's success caught the interest of University of Wisconsin Professor E. S. Goff and A.J. Hatch, a southern Wisconsin fruit grower. They planted experimental plots growing a variety of fruits. Locals inspired by the experiments, and seeing the success with cherries, planted many small orchards. By 1910, Door County gained national attention as a premier cherry growing region. The peak of production came in the 1950s, with 700 growers throughout the county harvesting 50 million pounds of cherries. More recently, in 2024, 10 million of the 13 million pounds of cherries grown in Wisconsin were estimated to have come from Door county.

Chriesibrägel - Cherry Compote



To recognize the contribution of Swiss immigrant, Joseph Zettle and southern WI grower A.J. Hatch, we share this simple and tasty heirloom recipe from the *Swiss Historical Village Past & Present* recipe book published by the New Glarus Historical Society.

1 lb. pitted, fresh cherries
1 Tbsp flour
1 Tbsp butter
½ cup sugar
A little cinnamon

Melt the butter in a saucepan; add the flour and cook until lightly browned. Add cherries and juice; cook until thickened to the consistency of a light sauce. Add cinnamon while cooking. If using wild cherries, add more sugar to your taste. This is a good side dish served with hot meat and potatoes (or over ice cream!).

Program - Weds, Aug 13 - The Collins Families

Join us as we welcome Laurie Collins to the Town Hall Auditorium on Wednesday, August 13 at 7 pm, when she will share the fascinating stories of her ancestors and other Collins families who made their homes in Baileys Harbor, some since 1857.

A number of Collins families immigrated to Door County from another beautiful peninsula, the Cooley Peninsula in County Louth, Ireland. Pictured at right is Hugh A. and Mary Ellen (Carmody) Collins, 1889.

Light refreshments will be served. The program is open to the public with no admission fee. Donations are welcomed to offset the cost of recording the program.