

LAKE FENTON MEMORIES

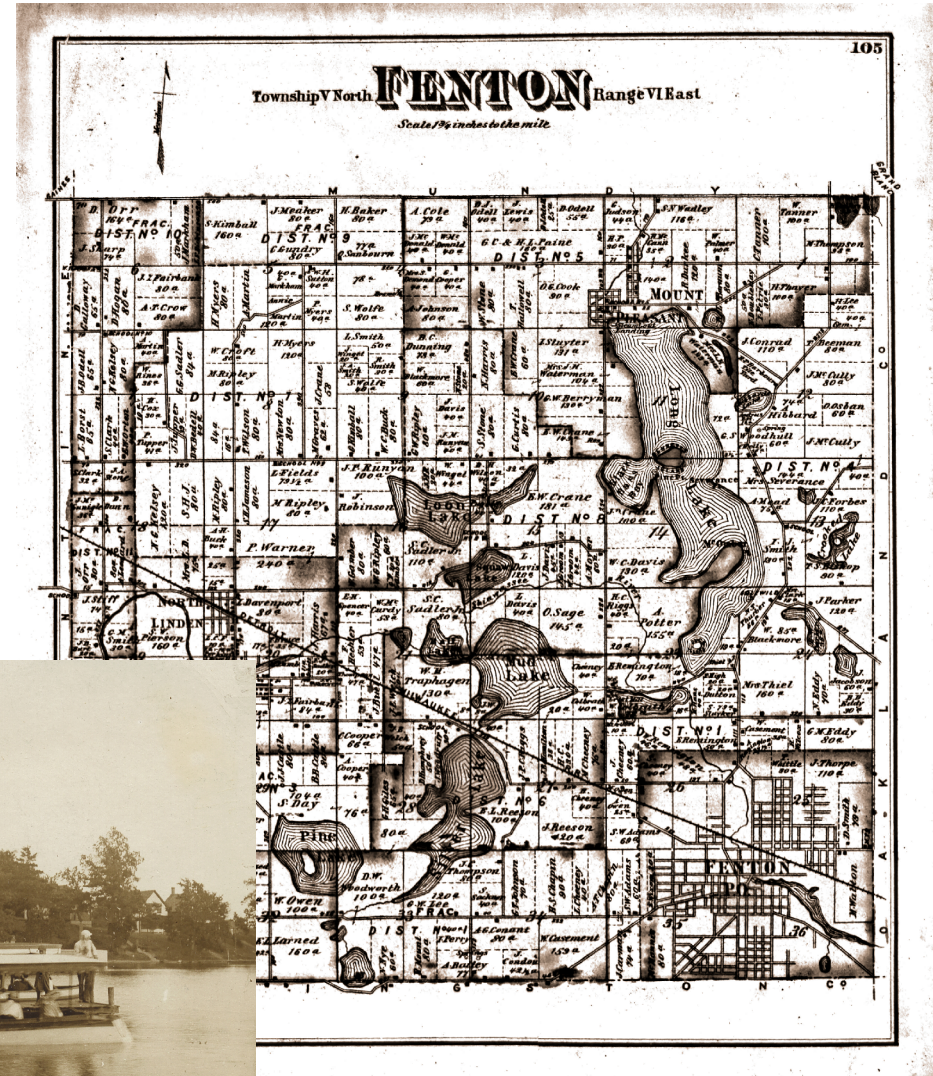


In the far southwest corner of Genesee County, Michigan, in Fenton Township, lies the largest lake in the county, known today as Lake Fenton.

Prior to being named Lake Fenton, it was called Long Lake, and was surrounded by farms, which made up most of Genesee County.

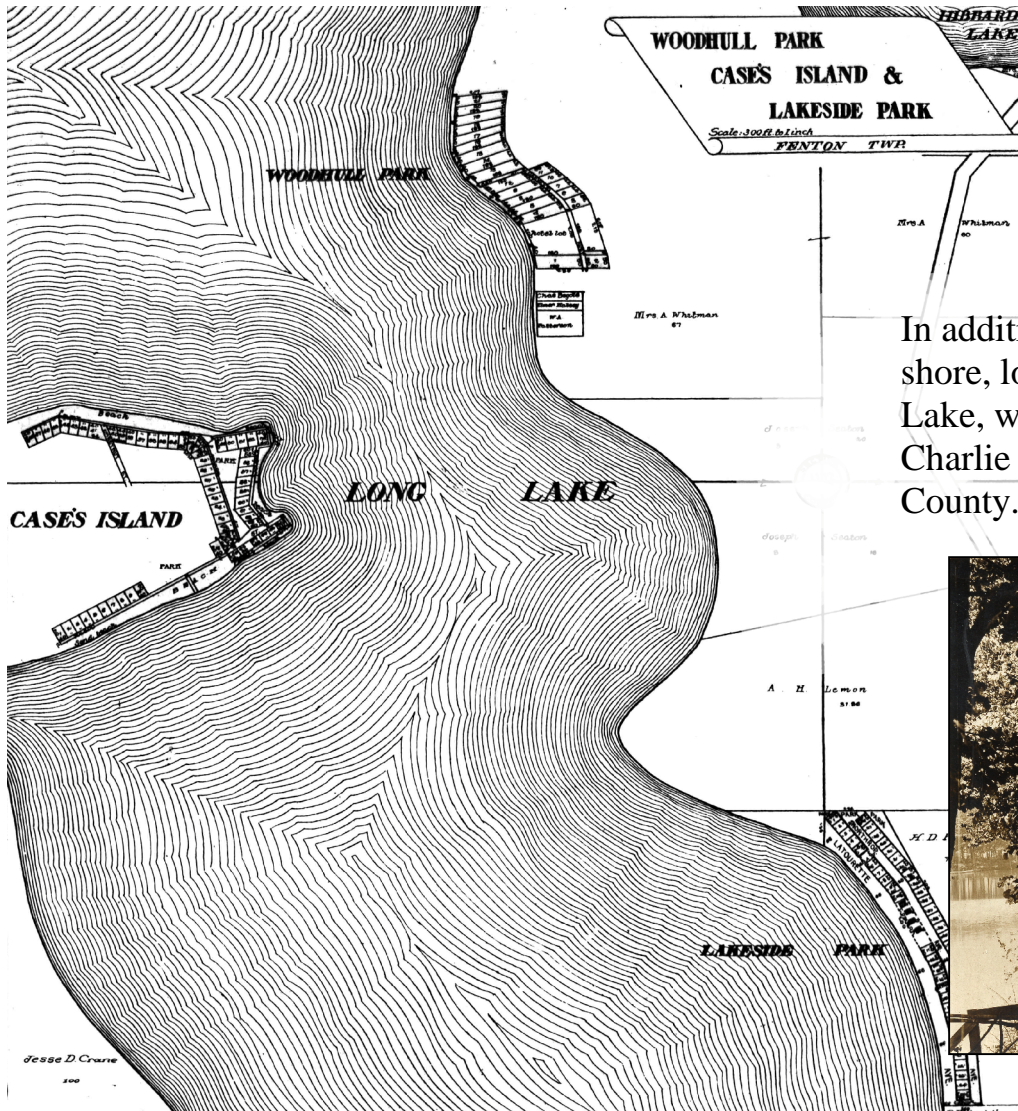
By the late 1800s, several farmers had subdivided their lakefront property and started selling lots for summer cottages.

Small communities, such as Lakeside and Bay Port, developed. A variety of boats and launches were built to ferry passengers to various points along the shore.





In this period aerial view of Long Lake, one can see how little development there was along its shores in the early days. Today nearly the entire shoreline is fronted with permanent homes and a few remaining seasonal cottages. Landmarks like Case's Island and Log Cabin Point are easily visible. Photo from *Fenton*, by Donna Seger, Kenneth Seger, and Fenton Historical Society, 2009.



In addition to the lots that were being sold around the shore, lots were also available on a large island in Long Lake, which came to be called Case's Island, named for Charlie Case. This map is from a 1907 atlas of Genesee County.





Summer residents and their guests got to Case's Island via one of several launches that plied Long Lake.



Typical cottages on Case's Island.

Both photos are from *Fenton*, by Donna Seger, Kenneth Seger, and Fenton Historical Society, 2009.

By at least the early 1900s, Jesse and Katharine Roat, who were then living in Flint, owned a cottage on Case's Island. On the picture below, Kate wrote: "Our cottage at Long Lake. Dear to the heart of all the older children."



*Our Cottage at Long Lake.
Dear to the heart of all the older children*

The Roat cottage was part of a semi-circle of cottages surrounding a small park. It was apparently a place full of activities and fun.

The picture to the right came from the photo album of Melvin Case, who was the son of Charlie Case, identified in the album as the “founder” of the island. The children are not named. The Roat cottage is at the far left.



Another photo from the album of Melvin Case is to the left. It was given this caption:

“Suckin’ cider thru a straw.”

Margaret Potts, Geraldine & Katharine Roat.

The Roat children were obviously part of the Case’s Island social scene.

A Roat family photo captures a group of children on Case's Island, including the Roat daughters. Back left is Marguerite, Katharine is standing at the far right in front of the taller boy, Geraldine Roat is seated holding a small child, and perhaps Eleanor is the little girl standing at the far left. The others are not identified.





The Roat girls are pictured with friends on Case's Island. From left are: Katharine, "Sis," Geraldine, Marguerite. In front are: Bobbie and Eleanor.



Bobbie gives Eleanor a kiss.
"Sis" and Bobbie, not related, have not been further identified.

Fishing was a favorite pastime at Long Lake. Showing off their catch is Jess Roat (far right), along with his parents, Levi Havilla Roat and Fannie Evelyn Coles Roat.





Case's Island was a great place for holiday celebrations. The many flags suggest that this may have been the Fourth of July. Judging by the ages of the children, this may have been about 1917-1918. The Roat family cottage is to the right. The Roat family is scattered through the large group of family and friends.

The detail views at right show, from top to bottom:

The oldest Roat daughters, Katharine, Marguerite (seated), and Geraldine and Eleanor (standing).

Jess Roat with Kate holding a baby, perhaps Bob.

The crawling baby may be Betty.





By the early 1900s, farmers were selling more of their property around Long Lake for the development of houses. One desirable plot was owned by the Severance family, which had owned the land since at least 1860. It included a point of land that extended into the lake and was called Severance Point.

About 38 acres of this land were purchased by Austin H. Lemen, part owner of the Lemen, Patterson and Thompson General Store in Fenton.

In 1903, Lemen built a magnificent log mansion, which included servants' quarters, a guesthouse, boathouse, barn, and ice house. Thereafter, the site of the log house came to be called Log Cabin Point. The house was demolished in 1948. The top picture shows the mansion in its heyday.

The old postcard view to the left shows the view from Log Cabin Point. At the left of the image can be seen the *City of Fenton*, which along with the *City of Flint* were two of the largest boats operating on Long Lake.



Both photos are from *Fenton*, by Donna Seger, Kenneth Seger, and Fenton Historical Society, 2009.



Soon, Log Cabin Point was not just for the wealthy. Jess and Kate Roat purchased a lot and constructed a cottage. According to family tradition, the house was built by Jess and his father Levi H. Roat from lumber milled from trees cut on the property. In the picture above, the Roats picnic on their property, perhaps before the cottage was built. From left: Katharine holding Betty, Jess in back, Eleanor, Bob, and Kate.

The cottage likely was completed by at least 1920. In the picture below, the earliest form of the house can be seen. Betty and Bob are on the homemade see-saw. On the steps are Jess, Kate, and Eleanor. The screened-in porch, with its views of Long Lake, would undoubtedly have been a favorite gathering place.





The Roat cottage at “the lake” became a gathering place for family and friends.

Posing in the boat, from left are: an unidentified girl, Betty Roat, an unidentified girl (perhaps one of the Frost girls), the Thomas twins, Bill and Jack (the twin sons of Roy Thomas, Kate’s brother), and Bob Roat.

In the picture to the right,
the same six children test the dock.





The cottage was always a welcoming place. In front are Roy Thomas, Kate's brother, and Kate. In back (left to right) are an unidentified couple, Jess, and Cecelia Thomas, Roy's wife.



Boats were always a popular setting for picture-taking. This one was taken in front of the Roat cottage, with the neighbor's cottage in the background.

At the far left is Betty Roat and at the right is Bob Roat with their dog Cody. The three girls may be the three Frost girls: Eloise, Carolyn, and Marjorie. The Frosts, Frank and Amy and their daughters, were close friends of the Roats in Flint.

Just south down the shore from Log Cabin Point was Lakeside, also known as Lakeside Park.

In the boat from left to right are: Jess, Bob, and Betty. The dog is unidentified.





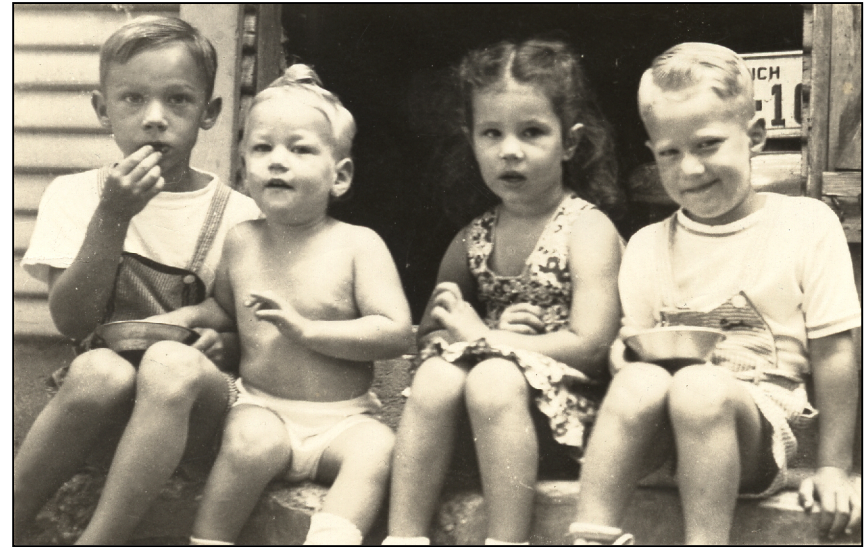
Jim O'Brien, Nancy Yates, Jack Stevens, about 1939.



Nancy Yates, Jack Stevens, Bob O'Brien, Jim O'Brien, about 1943.

In 1933, Long Lake was renamed Lake Fenton. In the 1930s, the cottage drew a new generation of guests, the grandchildren of Jess and Kate Roat.

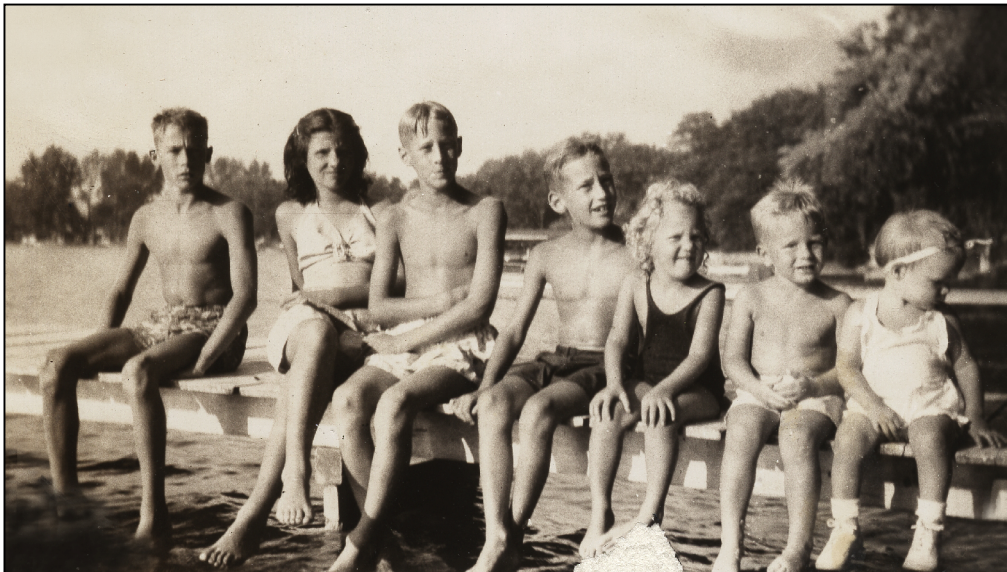
A favorite place for taking a picture of the grandchildren was on the step into the garage. The kids were often given a container of goodies to keep them occupied.



Jack Stevens, Bob O'Brien, Nancy Yates, Jim O'Brien, about 1941.

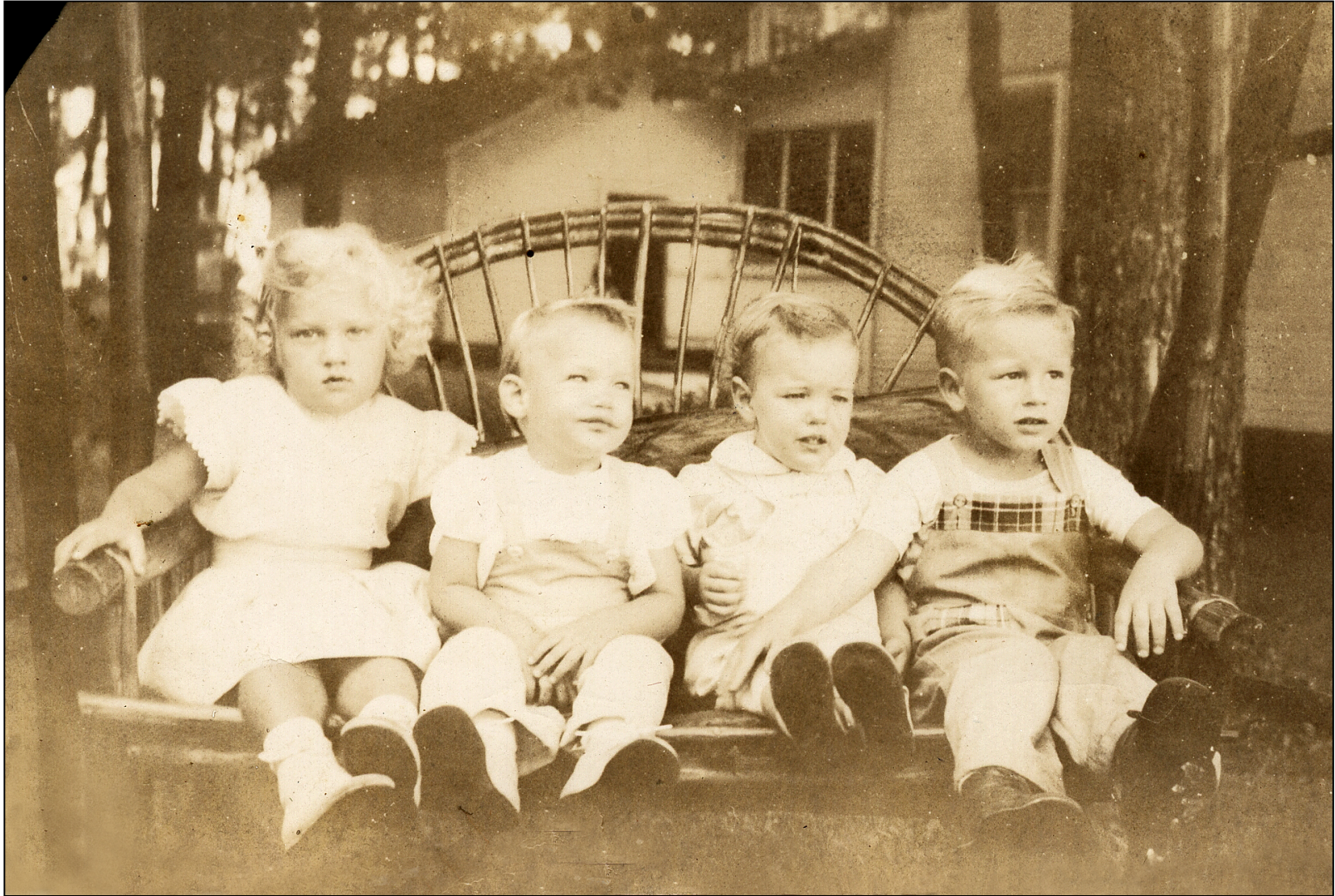
In about 1944, some of the Roat cousins were photographed on the lake shore. From left: Bob O'Brien, Jim O'Brien, Suzanne Gillam, Jack Stevens, and Nancy Yates.

The cottage is just visible in the shadows to the right. The wooden bench on the left would have been a great place to watch the sunsets.

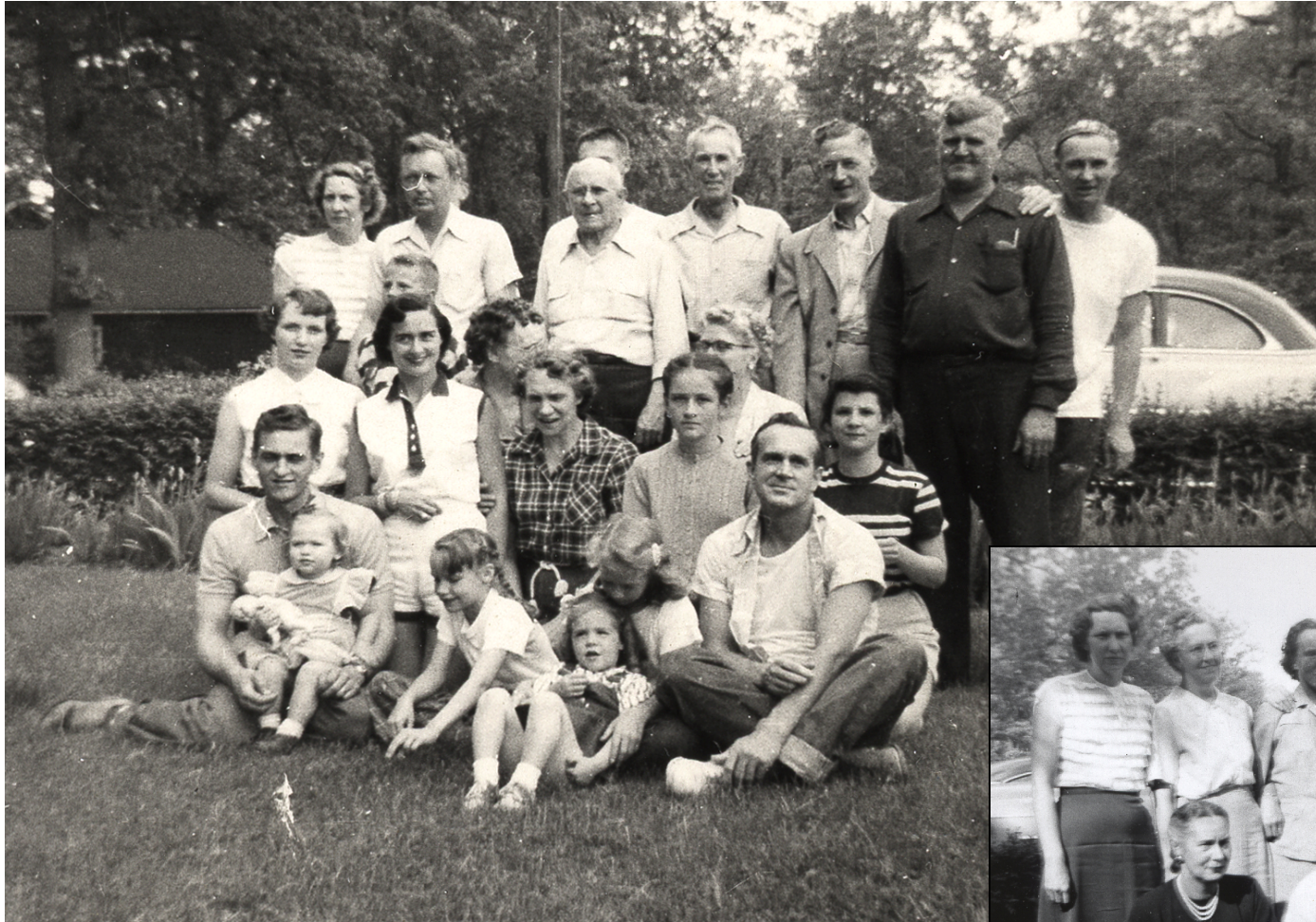


Taken probably in the summer of 1948, the picture to the left includes all of the Roat grandchildren born by that time (except for the oldest, Ralph Gillam).

They are seated in age order. From left: Jack Stevens, Nancy Yates, Jim O'Brien, Bob O'Brien, Pat O'Brien, Marty Read, and Karen Read.



The youngest Roat grandchildren in about 1948 pose in a classic rustic-style bench. From left: Patricia O'Brien, Karen Read, an unidentified child, and Marty Read. In the background, one can see the back of the cottage, where the kitchen and a small eating area were located, and the garage.



The Roat cottage on Lake Fenton was a great place for family reunions. A visit from the Bob and Lee Roat family always made for a special occasion. At right is the Jess and Kate Roat family. Back, left to right: Eleanor, Marguerite, Betty, Kate and Jess. In front: Katharine, Bob, and Geraldine. These pictures were taken on 31 May 1953.





To the left is how the front of the cottage appeared in 1953. Repairs were always needed.



Weather-permitting, family gatherings could dine outside under the shade of the large trees.



Stevens mailbox

Jesse Roat died in 1960 and Kate Roat in 1982. The Lake Fenton cottage then became the summer home of the Stevens family. What did not change was the welcoming hospitality that family and friends always felt at “the lake.”



The Stevens family cottage in 1982.



Katie Stevens





On 25 July 1986, perhaps the largest Roat family reunion was held at the cottage on Lake Fenton. The special guests were Frank and Mary Stiles Roat and some of their family. Frank is in the wheelchair with Mary beside him.

On 8-10 August 1997, a reunion of the Kate and Jesse Roat family was held to honor Katharine Roat Stevens near the time of her 90th birthday. Part of the reunion was held at the lake. This was the last large gathering of the Roat family at the old cottage.



Jack and Gay Stevens, wishing to make the Log Cabin Point property their retirement home, had an analysis done to see if the cottage, then nearly 80 years old, could be remodeled for year-round living. The cottage, only constructed for seasonal use, could not be salvaged. In its place, the Stevens family constructed a new home that was designed to be sympathetic to the first cottage. What resulted is an engaging lakeside home with all of the charm and warmth of the old Roat cottage. Jess and Kate would have loved it.



The Stevens Home on Lake Fenton





At left are the nine grandchildren of Jack and Gay Stevens in 2005. These children are—beginning with Levi H. and Fannie Roat—the sixth generation of the Roat and Stevens families to know the joys of life on Long Lake / Lake Fenton.

At left, from the top down, are:

Marybeth Hall, Christopher Stevens

Hannah and Lillian Alstrom

Steven Hall, Caroline Stevens, Andrew Hall

Katharine Alstrom, Lindsay Hall

With them, there are new memories being created every year on Log Cabin Point.

Prepared for Jack and Gay Stevens, Log Cabin Point, Lake Fenton, Michigan

by Norm and Pat Hellmers
August 2010

Photographs are courtesy of Jack and Gay Stevens, Karen Read Wolfson, Sara Thomas, Patricia O'Brien Hellmers, Charles and Merilyn Case, and the publication *Fenton*.