

Lucky me! A Docent's Perspective



By Mary Crane

For almost a century the Charles Olsen Farm has graced the wide curve on M22 in Port Oneida. Its classic charm attracts the attention of all who pass. A favorite subject of painters and photographers, one sees images of the farm in art galleries and on walls around the area.

The public is welcome, and many afternoons I have had the privilege of greeting visitors. Rain brings people who are looking for an indoor activity on a stormy afternoon. On sunny days people stop on their way to or from the beach. Most who come are just interested folks. They are first time visitors, returnees, or local residents. Every once in a while an actual Olsen descendent shows up. I'm sure to ask where people are from and if they have visited the house before. Far be it from me to tell Charles and Hattie Olsen's descendents what happened in their house. I love to hear their stories. In fact I love to hear everyone's stories. Some remember the house from their days at nearby Camp Kohahna. Others, cottagers like me, have been watching the house for years. Many are seeing it for the first time. All are delighted by what they see. We all seem connected to the Olsen Farm and Port Oneida in some way.

Today we can offer visitors to the house more than the restored exterior. I'm very excited about the exhibit that is being put together inside. The Olsens' story and that of their farm is the story of the Midwest. The new exhibit connects all the pieces. It starts with the original land, molded by the glaciers, and then tells of the Native Americans who first inhabited it. In the 1850's the European settlers began arriving. Port Oneida, with its location on Lake Michigan, was the perfect place for the Olsens and their cousins to settle. Farming, fishing, and working in local lumber mills sustained them for decades. Later, younger generations went off to the cities to find more profitable jobs. The few who stayed behind worked hard to eke out a living. So many towns in rural America have a similar history,

By the time the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore was created there was almost nothing left of Port Oneida. Resorters, had bought up plots of land here and there. The commercial focus of the area had relocated to Glen Arbor. All the open fields of earlier days had begun to fill with second and third growth vegetation. New life came with the arrival of the National Park Service. Suddenly all people had a stake here. The visitors themselves will become the subjects of the next chapters in the story. Today the spectacular surroundings await artists, hikers and leaf

peepers. Recreational opportunities abound. The Olsen Farm, with all its lessons and beauty, sits right in the middle. It is a bridge to the past that we all can take. It is also a part of today and now. I love that. So do many others. I find sitting there in the old farm house, sharing experiences and feelings, the ideal way to spend a summer afternoon. Lucky me.

Mary serves as our Docent Volunteer Coordinator. She and her husband winter in New Hampshire where she worked as a seasonal tour guide for Historic New England.

Cooking is Highlight at Port Oneida Fair's Olsen Farm



Susan Odom (left) was the first to cook on our newly refurbished antique cook stove! During the Port Oneida Fair, she and her assistant Julia Prisby (below), demon-

strated historic food preparation and cooked up a menu of boiled fish, fresh baked bread, corn, and berry pies. Her lively interpretation and the sweet and savory

scents drew crowds into the kitchen during the two-day fair in August. Hot humid weather



hampered fair attendance a bit but didn't douse Susan's enthusiasm in the hot kitchen.

Susan was a historic food demonstrator at Greenfield Village for seven years. She currently serves as curator for the Leelanau Historical Society.