

## THE FARM

The letter I received from Myron Vent in January of 1985 contained a very special memento from South Manitou Island. It was an original picture of a barn raising. In his letter Myron wrote:

*"In going through some pictures, I came across one which says,— 'This is the Sherridan farm. Just put up a new barn' ---- I'm enclosing it for your retention. Unfortunately I cannot identify any of the people in the picture. Most of these early barns were put together without nails. I know my grandfather's was put together with wooden pegs. The timbers were axe hewn, hinges were made of leather and door handles were made of wood. The islanders made do with what they had..."*

This picture was a total surprise because previously we had no knowledge of the Sheridans owing a farm on the island. It was always assumed that Aaron's father James came to live with Aaron at the lighthouse after his appointment there. After all, James was 66 years old and was not a young man by any means. The individuals in the picture have been the subject of much speculation by myself and my brother. Is Aaron and James in the picture? Is Julia or any of their children in the picture? Who is the man with the whiskey jug on the left side of the picture? Is he posing just for fun with the jug or is he for real? Note the size of the barns. These are big structures which would indicate that the Sheridans had a substantial farm there.

The surgeon's certificate prepared in connection with Aaron's Civil War disability pension in 1877 describes Aaron as being 5' 10" in height and weighing 157 pounds.

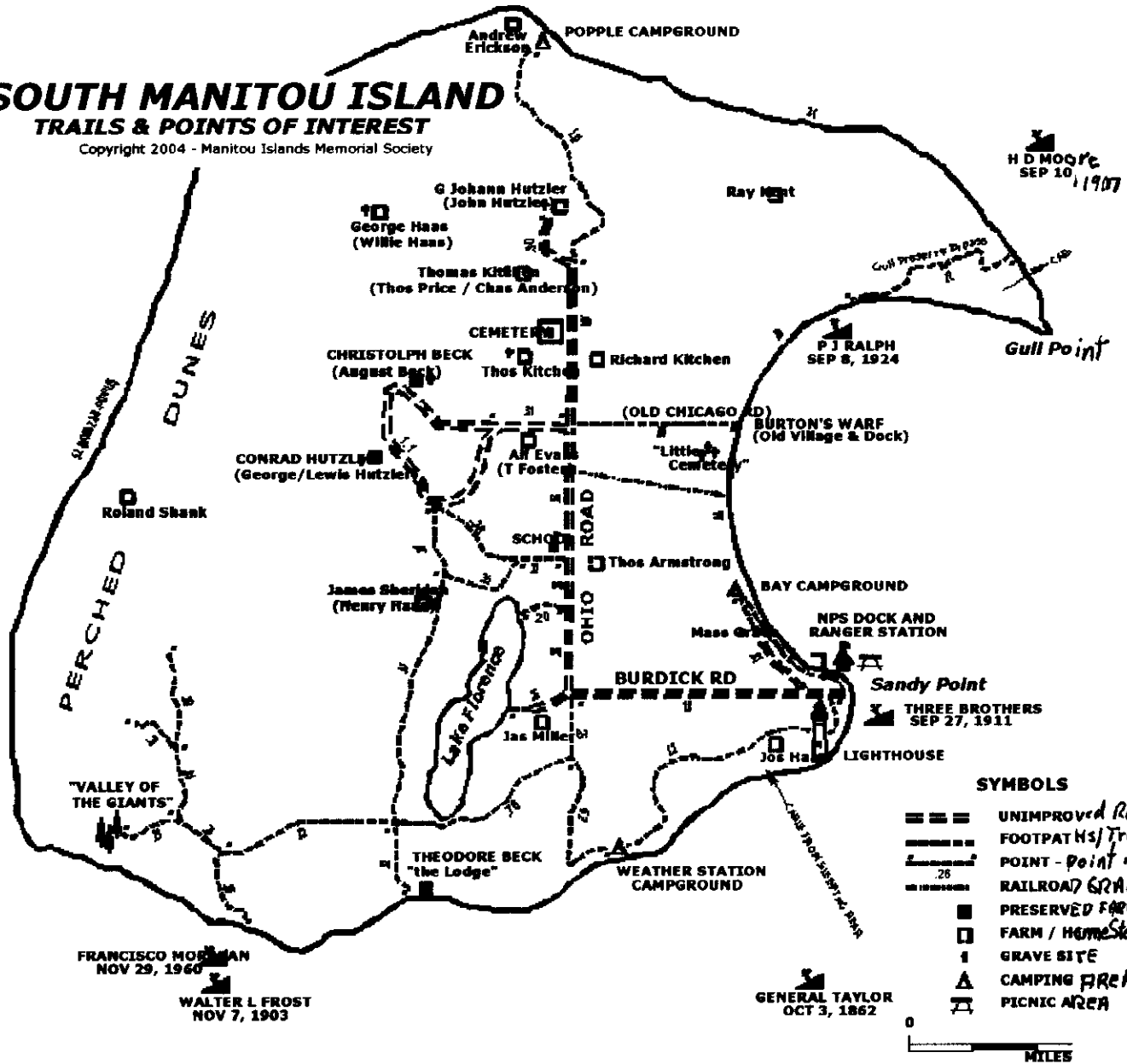
**We have determined that Aaron is probably the man sitting on the edge of the barn floor in the middle of the picture with his right arm raised and holding his cap in the air. On his left are two young children, one girl and a boy. Blow Ups of this picture would appear to support this supposition. The man appears to be of the same size as Aaron. His left arm seems to be "hanging" at his side similar to the way his arm appears in the only portrait of him we have. Also the cap appears to be in the style of a lighthouse keepers hat. Whether James is in the picture is not known. Since Aaron and Julia had no daughters, the girl next to "Aaron" could not be his child. The young boy next to the girl could be his son Levi who was born in 1866. If this is so then James could not be in the picture since he died in 1871 and Levi would have been only about five at that time.**

**Nothing further was known about the Sheridan farm until I received the letter from Linda Henry when she was working for the National Park Service in 1993. Her check of the island land records held in the Park Service archives showed that Aaron and James Sheridan purchased two parcels of land on South Manitou of over 210 acres on April 2, 1868. She states that the property was on the north side of Lake Florence.**

**In a second letter I received from Linda in November of 1993 she stated that a gentleman she had met on the island was a descendant of the Haas family and that the second farm the Haases owned on the island was purchased from the Sheridans and said it was quite an impressive farm at the time. Linda stated that there is still a house on the property but she is quite sure it was built later. A map of South Manitou showing the various parcels and owners on**

# SOUTH MANITOU ISLAND TRAILS & POINTS OF INTEREST

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Further information concerning the Sheridan/Haas farm came to light in 2004 when I came across a book entitled *Coming Through With Rye* which was reprinted by the South Manitou Island Memorial Society and placed on its internet website. The book was authored by Brenda Wheeler, Arnold R. Alanen, and William H. Tishler. It is an historic agricultural landscape study of South Manitou Island and was sponsored by the Midwest Regional Office of the National Park Service in 1996. The purpose of the study was to identify, evaluate and provide management recommendations for the historic agricultural landscapes at South Manitou. As a result of the study, a historic agricultural district on the island was recommended for nomination as a National Register District. The district was found to be significant because of its association with the transformation of rural agriculture in America from general farming to scientific agriculture spanning a period from 1838 to 1940. Prior to and during the 1920's, the island played an important role in plant genetics when George Conrad Hutzler and his son Louis introduced a new strain of rye and developed their internationally award winning Rosen Rye. Several years later the same Hutzlers introduced the Michelite Bean to the Island. Again, due to the Island's climate and isolation from the mainland, and their innovative farming techniques, the Hutzler's produced beans that won ribbons in state and international seed competitions.

One of the farms studied and described in *Coming Through With Rye*, is the farm originally homesteaded by James and Aaron. A specific description of the farm is set forth on pages 130- 132 of that publication and provides an interesting description of their 80 acre homestead. The particulars of the farm animals and crop production were found in the manuscript schedules for the 1870 Agricultural Census where Aaron is listed as the owner/agent/owner/manager of the farm. The information on the farm as it appears in *Coming Through With Rye* appears on the following pages:

“ Aaron Sheridan was appointed keeper of the South Manitou Island Lighthouse on 21 July 1866.<sup>58</sup> On 2 April 1868, his father, James A. Sheridan, filed Homestead Application Number 2937 for 130 acres of land on the island, described as Section 4, Township 30 North, Range 15 West, Lots One, Two, Three, and Four. He paid a \$13.25 filing fee.<sup>59</sup> The manuscript schedules for the 1870 Population Census indicate that James Sheridan was residing with his son, Aaron, and his family. The household consisted of Aaron (age 35), Julia (25), Levi (4), George (2), and James (69).<sup>60</sup>

The manuscript schedules for the 1870 Agricultural Census lists Aaron Sheridan as the agent/owner/manager of a farm that included 6 acres of improved land and 74 acres of unimproved woodland. The cash value of the farm was recorded as \$200. Sheridan had three milk cows, four other cattle, and three swine, with a total value of \$350. During the year that ended on 1 June 1870, the farm had produced 100 bushels of Indian corn, 200 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 200 pounds of butter; the Sheridans had slaughtered or sold for slaughter \$65 worth of animals. The estimated value of total farm production, including betterments and additions to their stock, was recorded as \$315.<sup>61</sup>

Aaron Sheridan filed a patent for the homestead claim on 9 April 1874. On the same day, August Beck and Eber Goin witnessed a proof stating that James Sheridan had settled on the property on 15 August 1867. The improvements included a log house that was one and one-half stories high with board floors, a shingle roof, one door, and two windows. Beck and Goin stated that James’ son, Aaron, continued to live in the house after his father’s death. The Sheridans had cultivated about 12 acres of land, “chopped” 7 additional acres, built a frame barn, and planted 40 apple trees and 25 currant bushes.<sup>62</sup>

Aaron Sheridan continued as the lighthouse keeper, and his wife the assistant keeper (she was appointed to this position on 9 September 1872), until 1878. In 1878, Aaron, Julia, and their child, Robert, were drowned in a boating accident.<sup>63</sup>

In 1883 George Haas purchased the property. The land was not farmed between the time of the Sheridans’ deaths and the purchase of the property by George Haas.<sup>64</sup> Henry Haas married Maggie Hutzler and the Sheridan homestead became their farm.<sup>65</sup> They raised a variety of crops and had a “Ginseng shed,” which according to Anderson consisted of “two-inch strips of lumber, from the local mill two inches apart so the plants could get partial sun.” In addition, they grew Michelite beans, saving the “best from their seeds by picking out the best during the winter months,” and made maple syrup. Henry Haas was known as the island dentist and also shoed horses, using shoes his brother, Bill, had made.<sup>66</sup> In 1947 Henry Haas died and in 1953 Maggie Haas died. They are both buried in the South Manitou Island cemetery.<sup>67</sup> The National Park Service purchased the property from Joseph W. Harrold, et al., in the 1970’s.<sup>68</sup>

### *Location*

This property is located at the northern end of Florence Lake; the remaining buildings lie just west of the lake. The site can be found by heading west from a marker on the trail that runs north-south along the western edge of the lake. The marker lies slightly north of the spot where a trail heads east around the tip of the lake.

### *Landscape Setting and Cultural Landscape Elements*

The site is difficult to approach due to very dense juniper and sumac clumps. Eventually the mid-story vegetation thins out, and one enters a wooded area. These woods have a dense groundcover of Vinca minor (Myrtle); the buildings can be seen not

far from the edge of the woods. They are surrounded by vegetation, which grows up to, and against the building walls. Near the house are rose bushes, poison ivy, lilies, and fruit trees. Apparently Maggie Haas had a very beautiful flower garden near the house.

***Buildings and Objects***

The house (22'-6" x 34'-6") is a one and one-half story building with a basement. It has a gable roof and shiplapped siding. The interior includes detailed molding, linoleum, and wallpaper, indicating that the house was quite fancy, at least by island standards. It is now in poor condition, and the windows and doors are not boarded-up, allowing the elements and animals to enter and weaken the structure.

The other structure on the site is a shed, which measures approximately 12' x 25'. The building had a gable roof and board and batten siding, but it is now in ruins."

We have no other information at this time about the operation of the Sheridan farm. To what extent did Aaron work the farm with his father? It seems he could not have been a full time lighthouse keeper and farmer at the same time, and there is no doubt he was full time at the lighthouse. If Aaron and James bought the farm in 1868, James was 68 years old at time. He may have lived and worked at the farm. The 1870 census however shows him living in Aaron's household. This census however is very confusing because it lists Aaron's occupation as "farmer" and James' occupation as "laborer." The census lists the value of Aaron's real estate at \$200 and the value of his personal property at \$600. It shows no property values for James. These questions may be answered some day upon further research but are unknown to me as I write this.

There appears in the letters sent to me by Linda Henry, a report from the district inspector dated August 24, 1875. It describes the condition of the light station at that time:

*"A thoroughly efficient light and in excellent order as to keeper's duties. Interior of the tower was badly painted two years ago; it has not dried yet. The fog signal house should be fenced in and the fences around the dwelling extended to the lake, to keep out cattle. A wire fence would work well, and be cheap also. The keeper is repairing the lighthouse boat, recently injured going to the assistance of a vessel ashore near the station.*

*The engine, boiler, valves and piping of the fog signal machinery were in good order. The keeper and 2<sup>nd</sup> assistant appear to understand its management very well. The latter has had experience as an engineer, and no further difficulty with it is anticipated. The cap of the steam whistle has a crack in its side five inches long which does not impair the sound now, but is liable to be broken in time by the blasts of steam. A new one should be fitted.*

*Furnished usual supplies: one fog signal lantern, one*

***Iron coal bucket, one coal scoop, one boats anchor, one barometer, one thermometer, one rubber oiler, four leather beltings, and two belt lacings, three and half pounds of Cotton-- waste, three quarters pounds rubber gaskets, and one gauge tool.***

**The above report, was written by the district inspector from the lighthouse tender Dahlia, after making its stop at the island and leaving the supplies noted in the report. It would appear that by August of 1875, Aaron and his 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Jeremiah Becker, had figured out the fog signal boiler and had it's operation under control.**