

FLORENCE HAAS – A REMEMBRANCE

Visitors to South Manitou Island often take the Island tour. One of the sights that they visit is the inland lake named Florence. Today there are few people alive who remember Florence Haas who died far away from family and friends in Galveston, Texas in December of 1943. Some accounts tell of her being the mail carrier between Glen Haven and the Manitous, but otherwise very little is known of her and her life on South Manitou Island.

Although I was only fourteen years old when my great grandmother, Florence Haas died in 1943, my memories of her are as vivid as yesterday. She always enjoyed visiting my mother who was one of her favorite grandchildren. My grandfather, Louis Hutzler, had left South Manitou late in the 19th century, to become head lighthouse keeper of his own station. My grandmother, Jessie Haas Hutzler, returned to South Manitou for the delivery of her first two children early in the 20th century. Her mother, Florence an experienced midwife, delivered aunt Gyda in 1900 and my mother, Jessie Hutzler, in 1902. The ties between my mother and her grandmother, Florence Haas, were very deep. They wrote to each other almost every month of their lives. It was this correspondence, along with family pictures, newspaper clippings, census reports and much family oral tradition that has aided me in this short reconstruction of her long and eventful life.

Florence Raymo Haas was born in 1863. The place of her birth was Racine, Wisconsin. This information I learned from my Grandmother. However, when I spoke with her youngest sister Donna Raymo Bancroft in 1962 she gave me Menominee Falls, Wisconsin as the place of birth. The cities are very close so either would do! The family traveled considerably before they arrived on South Manitou. Isaac Raymo was a man of many trades: lumber jack, deep sea diver, farmer, and fisherman. He was an extremely handsome man and it was no small wonder that Isabelle Fuller would marry him when she was barely sixteen years old. He was six years her senior. The U.S. Census of 1870 for South Manitou does not mention the Raymo family, but they are mentioned in the Census of 1880. Isaac and Isabelle Raymo had a large family of eleven children. Four were to die as infants. The only remaining son died at 24 in 1896. Florence was the second oldest of the remaining six daughters. Most were to enjoy long lives. Her sister, Evelyn Raymo Wyse lived well into her 90's.

By the Census of 1880 we also learn that Florence was already married to Joseph Haas and the mother of a 2 month old son. In my cousin Myron Vent's excellent work, *South Manitou Island; From Pioneer Community to National Park*, he reproduced the wedding picture of Florence and Joseph Haas. The original wedding picture was given me as a keepsake by my great grandmother and inscribed to me on the back. Myron comments in his book that the picture must have been taken in 1877 when Florence was fourteen. She was actually sixteen and the date of the wedding was 1879 in Manistee, Michigan. The Census of 1880 lists her first child Isaac (George) Haas as two years old when his actual age was 2 months. Hence the confusion over the 14 year old bride. The young couple actually eloped and were married in Manistee because parental opposition to the marriage was so great. Maria Hoffman Haas the mother-in-law to be, a woman of strong opinions, disliked young Florence Raymo, a woman of equally strong opinions.

The young couple eventually settled down on their small farm on the western end of the island near the lighthouse. Joseph Haas struggled hard to make a living and support his wife and three children. The family attempted to make a living from farming and

fishing and later as mail carriers. An account in a Detroit newspaper tells of their mail carrier days in an article which was published in 1905. At that time Florence was in her early forties and still an extremely handsome woman. Determination was always evident in her face.

From her earliest years she gained a strong reputation as a capable mid—wife. Many island children were delivered under her very careful and confident hands. I remember her saying, "I never lost a baby." Ethel Furst Stormer, whose family lived very close to my great grandmother, was one of Florence's babies and she tells a very amusing story. As a very small child Ethel was told by Mrs. Haas that "She was found in a juniper bush." For years, Ethel who always loved babies, searched juniper bushes on the island in vain looking for babies. Jessie Haas Hutzler, Florence's second child and my grandmother, gave me her copy of Martin Knudsen's *A Glean Across the Wave; the Biography of Martin Knudsen*. Martin Knudsen, a lighthouse keeper on the island, inscribed this copy to my grandmother and referred to page 41. He tells on this page how Mrs. Haas was attending his wife while my grandmother was in her high chair and barely eight months old. "Their neighbor Mrs. Haas was bustling around the kitchen..." It should be noted that my grandmother was born in 1883 and this would make her mother, Florence, herself only 20 years old! This was quite a remarkable woman. Strong, stubborn! One sensed the strength behind her quiet exterior. She was apparently self taught as there is no record of any formal education. She was a prolific reader and never lost her interest in politics or current events. I am fortunate that at her death her scrap book was passed on to me. It was a testament to her universal interests.



Lake Florence was once and still is referred to as the "Little Lake." I asked my grandmother who named the lake after great grandmother. She thought it was Sigwald Johnson. Other than the fact that we know great grandmother was friendly with the Ben Johnson family, I know of no way to really trace the source or origin of the name.

My great grandfather, Joseph Haas, drowned in Lake Michigan in 1912. He was alone and he apparently fell while loading a box from his boat hitting his head on the side of the boat thus rendering himself unconscious. He was spotted from the lookout and a boat was launched in minutes. Although there was still air bubbles in the water, he could not be revived. "The Visitor's Guide to South Manitou Island," published in 1989 says that Florence Haas supported her large family after her husband's death. This is not exactly true as both her son, George, and daughter, Jessie, were married and had families of their own in 1912. My mother, Jessie Hutzler, was ten years old! This leaves only Lawrence who might possibly have still been at home in 1912.

Florence Haas had received her license to pilot a boat the year before in 1911. Hence her claim to be the first woman to pilot a passenger boat on the Great Lakes. The framed copy of this license is one of the most treasured possessions that I have received from my great grandmother. After my great grandfather's death, Florence remained on the island for about five years. Later she became a cook on the boats crossing the Great Lakes. At

that time she seemed drawn to the sea. I have a picture of her taken in 1923 or 1924 with my father on one of the car ferries. I have a number of pictures of her, but this is the only one that I have ever seen where she is smiling and seems completely happy. My father was only 21 and was eager to win the approval of his wife to be's grandmother. Needless to say they became warm friends after her early opposition to him and his family. My father always was very fond of all my mother's family, but I think that great grandmother Florence Haas was always his favorite. She visited us for many years and I remember well that Christmas of 1942 when she traveled all the way from Texas for what was to be her last trip.

She often spoke of the old days on the island and I always listened. She gave me a five generation picture of our family. She was always proud of her heritage. From her English mother she traced her origins to colonial times. Her father was French. I sometimes wonder if her French-English background did not often set her apart from the other German settlers on South Manitou Island.

In her retirement years she invested wisely the money she made in Texas real estate. I always thought that it was strange that she chose to move so far from all her family and friends. But in those days money was to be made in land speculation. However, she did see that funeral arrangements were made so that her final resting place was to be in Green Bay, Wisconsin next to her daughter and son-in-law. By the 1930's South Manitou had become too remote for burial. After my mother passed away in 1989, I found among her possessions a number of letters from her grandmother. The last was dated December 7, 1943. The writing was so weak and unsteady that one could barely read it. She tells of being very ill, but tells of the good care of her neighbors and the hope that she would be better. During most of her life she seemed filled with the hope that things would always be better. By the time the letter reached my mother, she had already passed away and word had already reached us from Green Bay from my grandmother.

And so ended the life of one of the most remarkable women that I had ever known or had the pleasure of knowing. There is so much more that I could tell of her, but it would require a whole book. Her strong opinions and nature made her a number of enemies even among her own relations. I remember her as a kind and affectionate lady and I miss her very much. They do not make her kind any more. The mold must have been lost!

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