

Rolland Shank Homestead

Rolland Shank (also known as Rual and Rollin) came to South Manitou Island when his mother, Mary Ann Shank, married George Conrad Hutzler and they decided to take up farming on the Island. Records show that George Conrad purchased his property in the center of the Island in 1868 so Rolland probably arrived some time shortly before that.

None of the Conrad Hutzlers are listed on the 1860 census but by 1870 the family had arrived and "Rollin" was listed as being thirteen years old. This census of 1870 indicates he was born in Pennsylvania. He is again listed as a member of the George Conrad Hutzler family in the 1880 census. The census of 1880 states that both of his parents were from Saxony, that he was twenty four years old and was a farm laborer. Again in 1900, the census lists Rolland as resident in the Hutzler household although neither Conrad nor Mary Ann remain and the household is headed by his half brother, George. By this time Rollin was forty four years old and one might think he had settled in.

However, records show that on August 14, 1903 Rolland Shank purchased a little over ninety acres of land on the Island's western bluffs. The 1910 census shows that he was at that time the head of a household of which he was the only member. A picture of his homestead indicates he had several small, slightly ramshackle buildings on his property.

Rolland earned his living on the Island doing odd jobs and farm labor for the other farmers. He apparently kept to himself a lot because he came to be known as "the Hermit".

According to Charles Anderson, one day Rolland was working for Anderson's father digging potatoes. He bent down to pick up his coat and his lunch pail, fell over and didn't get up. (Anderson, p. 61) Joseph Orbeck is the grandson of Mary Ann Shank, Rolland's sister. He has a Western Union telegram which is addressed to Mrs. Julius Krause, who is Mary Ann's daughter. The telegram says simply, "Roland Shank is dead Answer if you are coming yours truly Geo C Putzler" The date is October 20, 1915.

Charles Anderson says, "He had no other relatives..." and it strikes a pathetic note that this lonely hermit should die on this isolated Island with nary a soul to care. However, this picture is apparently not accurate. Rolland must have been close to his half-brother and his family since he lived with them for so many years. Also since George married Margaret Haas, Roland was also tied into that family. Mr. Orbeck has a letter to Rolland's niece in Kalamazoo from Henry Haas. Henry is sending some money and ordering some cigars, oranges and "Pine apples".

According to Orbeck, Rolland's sister, Mary Anne had married Julius Krause and they had a large family of around eleven children. There was a good deal of visiting and letter exchanging between the Island families and the mainland families and, from Joseph Orbeck's description, Rolland was somewhat of a participant in all of these comings and goings.

Rolland seems to have come to the Island in the midst of the main influx of inhabitants and to have been absorbed into the Island community as well as the extended family that was formed by his sister's marriage. He clearly must have felt comfortable in this isolated and, for many, forbidding environment and carved out a life for himself as a single self-sufficient resident of this hardy group of pioneers.