Island Heritage

A Guided Tour to Lake Erie's Bass Islands
Dedication

*Island Heritage* is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Richard J. Wright whose untimely death in September 1986 left an unfillable void in the pursuit and dissemination of Great Lakes’ history and lore. As the author of this book’s section on the steamers and ferries so vital to Lake Erie’s rich history, Rick Wright drew upon his years of experience and interest in maritime history. It was his personal archives that formed the basis for the Insititute for Great Lakes Research, the largest collection of Great Lakes’ documents, photographs, and related material in the nation.

Dr. Wright’s vast knowledge of the Great Lakes and of the people and the hundreds of vessels that have plied their waters earned him an international reputation.

It was an honor for me to collaborate on this work and to have been his associate at Bowling Green State University’s Center for Archival Collections for several years. Dr. Wright’s legacy will live on in this and dozens of other writings and in his Institute’s collections, which will serve as the primary Great Lakes maritime heritage resource for generations to come.

Ted J. Ligibel
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Foreword

Island Heritage originated nearly a decade ago when the Center for Archival Collections, an integral part of the Bowling Green State University, and the Historic Preservation Office for Northwest Ohio collaborated to conduct a survey of historic structures on the Bass Islands in western Lake Erie. This survey, sponsored by a grant from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, identified and inventoried over two hundred island buildings.

At that time, the Center for Archival Collection had the largest documentary holding in the country dealing with Great Lakes maritime history and the Lake Erie islands region. Of particular importance was the Center’s extensive historical information and photographs of the many ships (a few are included in this book) that were identified with servicing the islands during the past one hundred thirty years. Recently these collections were moved to a new facility in Perrysburg, Ohio, where Bowling Green State University founded the Institute for Great Lakes Research.

In 1980, based on their previous experience, Dr. Richard J. Wright, the Center’s director, and Mr. Theodore J. Ligibel, historic preservation officer for northwest Ohio, proposed to the Ohio Sea Grant Program that a project be sponsored to prepare a publication entitled “Portrait of the Bass Islands: A Handbook of Architecture and History.” They argued that no definitive handbook existed which detailed the unique historical environment of the Bass Islands on the western end of Lake Erie. The principal objective of their project was to produce a high quality booklet that put together two factors—structures and ships—to bring out the unique heritage of the islands. Interrelated with the island traditions and the isolation imposed by the
geographical conditions of the nineteenth century are maritime activities. This dependency upon water transportation for both passenger and freight has intensified the nostalgia of the island heritage.

Dr. Wright and Mr. Ligibel were successful in their proposal and in September 1981, supported by an Ohio Sea Grant award, began work on Island Heritage. Funding came from the Ohio Sea Grant Program, the National Sea Grant College Program, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Commerce (grant number NA81AA-D-00095, project A/P-2), and from the State of Ohio.

Many islanders contributed to the work, particularly Jeff Koehler, local historian, and Mary Beckford, reporter with the Port Clinton News Herald. Harry Myers, superintendent of Perry’s Victory and International Peace Memorial, National Park Service, graciously supplied many historical photographs from the Herbster Collection. The staff at the Center for Archival Collections worked hard to see that both authors were able to produce this work. Maps were illustrated by Sue Abbati of the Ohio Sea Grant Program. Editorial work was done by Kay Ward Davis and Sarah Serafin. Preproduction coordination was provided by Maran Brainard of the Ohio Sea Grant Program.

Dr. Wright’s untimely passing in September 1986 has left a tremendous void in the ranks of Great Lakes maritime scholars. His accomplishments in this field are many and we are pleased to be able to publish this, his final work. Ted Ligibel currently serves as Historic Resources Planner for the Urban Affairs Center at the University of Toledo.

CHARLES E. HERDENDORF, DIRECTOR
Center for Lake Erie Area Research
Ohio Sea Grant Program
Franz Theodore Stone Laboratory
The Ohio State University

Put-in-Bay, Ohio
January 14, 1987
Preface

Located in western Lake Erie and easily accessible by ferry from the mainland, Ohio’s Bass Islands—South Bass, Middle Bass, North Bass, and Gibraltar—feature an exciting variety of sights and activities for tourists. Grand old summer homes, quaint public buildings, wineries and ancient stone wine cellars, picturesque farmhouses, and unique caves are but a few of the scenic and historical attractions found scattered throughout these isles.

This guidebook is intended to give to the Bass Islands tourist an accurate and informative description of the area and its places of interest. Eight tours of varying lengths are found in these pages. Each tour can be completed in a few hours or less, and detailed explanations are given about the stopping points.

Numbered maps pinpointing the sights on each tour are also included, as are many photographs that depict buildings no longer present or identify architectural styles. A history of the island steamship trade and photographs of some of the steamships follow the tours. The glossary of architectural styles and terms is designed to help the beginner identify and appreciate the various architectural styles found in the islands.

We hope that, in addition to increasing the tourist’s enjoyment of the Bass Islands, this guidebook will serve as a souvenir and will evoke many pleasant memories of the region in the years to come.
Note
Many of the structures highlighted in *Island Heritage* are privately owned.
Visitors should respect personal property rights.