

Sisters Island

The recorded history of the island in the River Raisin now known as *Sisters Island* can be traced back to 1807 when it was listed in the estate of Antoine LaSalle. “The island’s low undergrowth later concealed refugees who fled across the ice from the LaSalle farm the night of the Battle of the River Raisin [War of 1812] (Monroe Evening News, March 2, 1964)

Ownership of the island, “containing 3 acres more or less,” changed twenty times in the nineteenth century before it was purchased by Monsignor Edward Joos in 1886. Wedworth Wadsworth, who bought the island at auction in 1844, encircled the island with rows of stately elms. “The weeping willows on the east and a border of thorn bushes filled with wild grape vines are living testimony to his horticultural design.” (ibid.)

The most interesting owner was Edward Pincus who acquired the island in 1852. Described in newspaper accounts as a “dapper little man” who played the piccolo, Mr. Pincus built a footbridge to the island and invited the public to enjoy the ice cream, lemonade, and sweets he sold from his confectionery. With musicians entertaining the public in the evenings, *Belle Isle* (the name he gave it) became a popular place for outings prior to the Civil War. After earning a substantial income, Edward Pincus, who had bought the island for \$300, sold it in 1854 for \$2,500 and moved to Philadelphia. (In 1833 it had been sold for \$16 and in 1849 for \$10.)

William Kirschmaier continued to operate the confectionery for a time, providing the public with lovely flower gardens and beautiful German music for dances. When the island passed to a Zion Lutheran minister, it ceased being a recreational site. This may also account for the name *Isle of Patmos*, first recorded in ownership records in 1869.

On September 2, 1886, Monsignor Joos purchased the island from William and Ellen Robert for \$700. The next day he transferred ownership to Mary Riley (Mother Justina).

“The island situated in the River Raisin opposite St. Michael’s Church was purchased last Fall. Dear Very Rev. Father [Joos] who is always most anxious to contribute to the health

and recreation of the children spared no pains to improve the island by having trees planted and in many ways making it a very pleasant place. Now that warm weather has come, and the island is convenient to the Convent, it gives many welcome walks and is a most agreeable resort for the Children during an occasional free time (Motherhouse Chronicles, [spring] 1887).”

For the safety of the students, Msgr. Joos replaced the old swing bridge with a timber bridge at a cost of \$200 to \$300. But winter ice packs on the River Raisin weakened the structure and the bridge was finally demolished around 1914. No longer used as a recreational area by the [St. Mary] Academy, the trees, grass, and flowers of the island flourished. In 1931 Sister Miriam directed our workmen to dig up hundreds of saplings from the island and to plant them on the new Motherhouse-Academy campus.

Owned by the IHM Congregation for more than 100 years, the island, commonly known in Monroe as *Sisters Island*, is a place where nature is free to flourish as freely as it did prior to the arrival of the first white settlers.

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