

Life on Baker Island

Notes from an Interview with Leona Gilley Sawyer

by Hugh L. Dwelley

In 1960 Wendell Hadlock taped an interview with Leona Gilley Sawyer. Leona grew up on Baker Island (not Baker's she says) at the turn of the century. She was the daughter of Samuel B. and Harriet Gilley. Harriet came from Tremont. Leona was born on October 30, 1891. Leona's great grand parents were William and Hannah Lurvey Gilley whom, she says, built and lived in a log cabin when they first came to Baker some time between 1807 and 1812.

Leona names the owners of each of the houses on Baker when she was growing up. At that point, more were Stanleys than Gilleys. The Stanleys having come there to marry Gilley girls. Several of the Gilley men also married Stanleys on Islesford, Great Cranberry Island, or elsewhere.

Edna Campbell of Islesford taught on Great Cranberry and on Baker. From what Leona says, she may have been the last teacher at the Baker school. There were only three students when Leona attended the Baker Island school.

Each of the families on Baker had a good market garden and animals. Leona's father had an ox and sometimes two. There were pigs, sheep, cows and ducks. They ate a lot of wild birds and sold their feathers. Every house had a cool dirt-floored cellar hole where large quantities of vegetables were stored for the winter. (In a separate interview, Bert Spurling said that his family on Great Cranberry stored 15 bu. of potatoes for each winter.) In summer, lots of tourists came to the island to picnic and they were often given wild birds.

The primary economic activity was lobstering. Lobster smacks served as supply boats to the island. Also, in summer, the Gilleys and Stanleys bought small quantities of groceries at stores on Islesford. Each fall, however, the smacks brought barrels of flour and large boxes of crackers, bolts of cloth, and other provisions. They also ordered clothing and toys, etc. from catalogs and they were delivered by the smacks. The lobster smacks were their life line.

Leona had skates and a manufactured sled. In summer, she played in the woods and on the rocks around the island. She rowed and spent lots of time in boats. Leona did not learn to swim.

For more history of Baker Island and genealogy of the Gilleys and Stanleys who lived there, order **Pioneer Settlers of the Cranberry Islands - The Gilleys of Baker Island and Islesford**, published by the Islesford Historical Society.

Wendall Hadlock's tape with Leona Gilley Sawyer is in the archives of the Islesford Historical Society.