

The Seamans of Drummond Island

Drummond Island was seeded with Seamans by a grandson of Caleb Seaman in 1853. This island, located at the juncture of three of the Great Lakes, became home for a long line of descendants of Daniel Murray Seaman, an early adherent to the Mormon religion.

A hundred years later, John T. Nevill wrote a series of articles about the Seaman family of Drummond Island and these were published in a local newspaper, *The Evening News*. An index to the entire series of 17 articles from 1953 is [here](#).

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The Seaman Story - No. 6

Sault Locks Were Being Started When Seamans Moved to Drummond

Drummond Settlement - It is unfortunate that the Seamans of Drummond - this island's oldest and largest family - have never had a historian in the true sense.

Some descendants of Daniel Murray Seaman, Sr., first of all the island's Seamans, have kept records, of course. Some have built up scrap books, maintained family Bibles, and saved odds and ends which, collectively, throw much light on the family's history. Notable among these are Mrs. Fern Newell and Mrs. Newell's sister, Mrs. Myrtle Bailey, both of whom reside on Drummond Island, and are daughters of the late Lillie Fairchild, who was one of the daughters of Daniel Murray and Betsy Seaman.

Among other Seaman descendants who have shown much interest in the family's beginnings are Miss Nona Butterfield, of Chicago, whose mother was the late Lovina Seaman Butterfield; Mrs. Laurence Brown of Riverside, CA, whose mother was the late Estella Seaman Johnston; and the late Miss Leila Seaman, who died just last year.

Documents Lost

Miss Leila, eldest child of the late Ludlow and Margaret (Melvin) Seaman, is said to have owned the most interesting collection of family documents of them all - but all of her documents were destroyed by a fire a number of years ago.

Almost nothing is known, for example, of the Seaman's sojourn on Big Beaver, capitol of the Mormon "kingdom", from whence the family fled 100 years ago - although it has been established that Don Carlos Seaman, a son, was born there in 1852. It also is known that Celia, a 16 year-old daughter by Seaman's first wife, was married there to a lighthouse keeper named Ludlow P. Hill.

Little or nothing is known, for sure, about the family's manner of leaving the Beavers - except that they fled the place in a small boat, and that Celia (evidently) did not flee with them. She and her husband were to join the family on Drummond later.

Similarly, little is known of those first 10 years on Drummond - the decade just prior to Daniel Murray Seaman's death - except that five more children were born; that Celia and Ludlow Hill came to live on the island; and that Sam, Celia's full brother, journeyed to Cleveland on a lumber schooner, and while there met and married Josephine Thurston.

But by placing those years against a back drop of known events of the period, we can obtain a fair idea of what life was like on the Drummond Island of that day.

To Legislature

In 1853, for instance, "King" Strang, despotic leader of the Beaver Island Mormons, was elected to the state legislature - which, incidentally, could have made it easier for the Seamans, and other disillusioned Mormons, to escape the islands. That was the year, too - Seaman's first year on the island - in which a meeting was held for the purpose of organizing and obtaining a charter for a new township, the Township of Drummond.

Records show that that important meeting was held in Seamans' home in the Settlement. So the Township of Drummond, in 1943 also is celebrating its centennial year, and plans are underway not only to commemorate that occasion, but to mark it indelibly on the public conscience by changing the name to "Drummond Island Township".

On the island of 100 years ago, wintry winds whistled through all that was left of old Fort Drummond, which had been abandoned by the British only 25 years earlier. And all up and down the old St. Mary's, the area's handful of white settlers were talking excitedly about the prospects of a canal at the Sault, which would make for speedy travel into and out of Lake Superior.

Probe for Rock

The Sault canal, moreover, was far more than just talk, Along Drummonds' north shore, just east of where Drummond Settlement now looks out over the island-studded beauty of Potagannissing Bay, men already were probing the rocky ledges beneath a thin topsoil, preparatory to opening a quarry from which stone could be obtained to speed the canal's building. And, if any Drummond Islander chanced to be watching DeTour Passage, west of the island, on June 1 of that year, he would have seen history in the making. He would have seen the steamer "Illinois", upbound, carrying mules, horses, supplies, provisions, and 400 workmen. Just three days later, those workmen were destined to begin excavating for the first American lock!

Merely looking at the steamer "Illinois" should have been thrilling enough. Steam vessels had been known on the Lakes for more than 30 years - since Capt. Fish sailed the historic, but short-lived "Walk-in-the-Water" from Buffalo to Detroit in 1818 - but very few of them were to be seen so far north as the St. Mary's River.

There were a few, of course - awkward, doughty, noisy little vessels - leaving trails of wood smoke, and churning up far more water than the "Queen Mary" would today. Thirty years before, in 1822, the proud little side-wheeler "Superior", had brought Henry Row Schoolcraft to his post as Indian agent at the Sault - and had become the very first steamboat to navigate the St. Mary's! The wood burning "Superior" - she would consume a cord of wood in 50 minutes! - also brought up the soldiers who were to build Fort Brady. But she had to discharge her passengers and supplies some distance from her destination. She drew eight feet of water, and she couldn't pass over the limestone flats at the lower entrance to Lake George.

Another backdrop casting light on life as it was on Drummond during the 'fifties and 'sixties is provided by the state's lumbering industry. This gigantic operation still was many years from its peak in the sawdust - coated town of Saginaw and Bay City, miles upon miles to the south.

Bought Engine

About two decades before the Seamans came to Drummond, a man named Harvey Williams had set up the first sawmill on the Saginaw River - and the engine furnishing power for the at mill was itself an historic piece of machinery. It was one of the engines which had propelled the steamer "Walk-in-the-Water", and when that pioneer Great Lakes steamboat foundered and sank near Buffalo, it had been placed in the steamer "Superior". When the "Superior" was abandoned, after ten years of noble service, Harvey Williams bought that engine, transported it to Saginaw - and initiated one of the greatest lumbering booms this nation ever witnessed!

Beginning with the Farnsworth & Brush sawmill, built in Menominee in 1832, and another in Escanaba in 1841, the Upper Peninsula, by the middle of the last century, had a handful of sawmills - but lumbering on a grand scale was destined to await lumbering's decline in the Lower. The federal government's Upper Peninsula land surveys still were too new, and stands of first-grade pine in the Lower still too plentiful to make it otherwise. Although lumbering land-lookers were prowling everywhere about the Upper's magnificent forest - measuring God's handiwork against dollars and cents - the Upper Peninsula, in the main, was excited about copper and iron - not lumber.

Large Stands of Pine

Thus it was that Drummond Island still contained large stands of imposing virgin pine - still virtually untouched by man. These noble trees later were to mean much to Daniel Murray Seaman's children, and grandchildren, but during the 'fifties and early 'sixties, the Island's first Seaman seemed unaware that fortunes in timber stood all about him.

On the contrary, the Seamans built a shelter of sorts along the north shore of Drummond Island, in the area now known as "The Settlement", and began the task of earning a living in the only way open to them - by planting vegetables and other crops in bits of cleared land here and there; by fishing in the heavy-laden waters around the

island; or by cutting hardwood fuel for a desultory steamboat trade. This was the home in which a group of men assembled on evening, sat in formal meeting, and brought to life the new-born Township of Drummond.

In 1859, just four years before Mr. Seaman's death, he purchased some property on Drummond, which later was to mean much to his descendants. From a man named Joe Kemp, then living on Lime Island, he bought 160 acres Kemp himself had obtained a government patent on just two years earlier.

However rough the decade prior to D.M. Seaman's death might have been, it was no more than an overture to the decade which followed it. But Betsy Seaman, abundantly supplied with raw courage, was undaunted. On the day her husband was laid to rest in the little cemetery up the road, she took stock of the situation:

First, there were the children, several of whom, by then, had attained maturity. Celia, oldest of the lot, was 27, and she and her husband, Lud Hill, had joined the family on Drummond. Naida, next oldest, was 26. Sam was 22, but he had married, and was beginning a family of his own. Sam Seaman's son, George Murray Seaman, was born in Illinois in 1864. Celia, Naida, and Sam were Betsy Seaman's step-children.

Edwin, eldest of Betsy's own children, was 19. Lovina (now Mrs. Sam Butterfield) was 18. Eliza was 13, Don Carlos, 11, Alice, nine, Stella, seven, Ludlow, almost six, Lillie, three, and Daniel Murray, 18 months.

A Wide Trail

Then there was the property she and D.M. were homesteading, plus the four "forties" D.M. had purchased from Joe Kemp. This property, incidentally, lay along the west side of the north-south road leading toward what was termed the "Channel Road", which in the 'sixties must have been no more than a wide trail leading toward old Fort Drummond and DeTour Passage.

The Civil War was on; prices of foodstuffs were high - but this was a double-bladed sword. The first American lock at the Sault had been opened to traffic for eight years - since 1855 - and steamboat traffic up and down the river was increasing constantly. Even the stately sailing vessels required tugs to tow them through the river's narrow and tortuous channels - and tugs were wood-burners too.

All boat traffic up and down the river, Betsy reasoned, had to have wood to generate that all-important steam. She could produce that wood - plenty of it! - from the island's hardwoods, both on and off her own property.

Betsy Seaman knew she could count on her older boys to toil in the woods, producing precious steamboat fuel. She'd hire Indians to help them. Their spare time would be time enough for fishing, although that had definite commercial aspects, too.

The girls would help with the gardening and other chores. Betsy thought the whole thing out - and there was a determined set to her chin. Daniel Murray Seaman slept eternally down the road a piece in a pretty little spot he had selected himself, but Betsy knew everything would turn out all right.

John T. Nevill
Drummond Settlement
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