

The laird of Duck island by Carleton W. Angell. [Taken from the Quarterly Review of the University of Michigan Alumnus, Dec. 10, 1938].

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CHASE S. OSBORN The portrait bust.

THE LAIRD OF DUCK ISLAND

By Carleton W. Angell

ON ANY road map of Michigan a long, cone-shaped island, may be seen lying just east of Sault Ste Marie in the St. Mary's River. This is Sugar Island, which received its name many years ago because of the abundance of sugar maples covering its hills and valleys. Although it lies close to one of America's greatest commercial routes, its isolation and its lack of communication with the mainland has preserved much of its original rugged beauty. Here former Governor and former Regent Chase S. Osborn makes his home during the summer months, and it was here that Mrs. Angell and I were to spend six weeks while I did a portrait bust of the Governor. We were requested to come about the first of August because then the Governor would have time for sittings, and also because August on Sugar Island is one of the finest months of the year.

Arriving at the Soo we found the city a veritable beehive; it is that way in summer. We purchased a few provisions, inquired for the ferry, drove ten minutes or so on US-2, and found ourselves at the dock. Since the ferry was on the opposite side, I blew our horn as instructed and soon a great turtle ploughed its way through the swift channel water toward us—an ungainly homemade scow, with a hump through the middle. The skill with which the two boys take it day after day across the river never ceased to amaze us.

The road from the dock to within a mile of the University of Michigan property is of well-packed gravel, and winds its way through acres of farm lands, small trees, 20 brush and heavy forest, and over hills on which cattle graze. From the crests of these hills one may glimpse the Island topography in its relation to the waters of Lake Nicolet and Lake George, and may obtain views beyond to the gray-blue hills of Michigan and Canada, where they roll on

THE GANDER One of the Osborn houses on Sugar Island.

and on into the distant haze—a beautiful, expansive panorama.

The permanent inhabitants of the Island number about five hundred, two-thirds of whom are Indian, the remainder mostly American and Finnish. The largest group lives at Baie de Wasig, or Bay of

Bullheads, a picturesque little settlement of fifteen or twenty scattered dwellings, a general store, schoolhouse, and little white church, located three miles from the ferry landing. Most of the story-and-a-half dwellings are of squared-log construction, spotless with whitewash. Around a turn in the road nestled between the grassy shore of Lake Nicolet and a large hill, this quaint settlement unexpectedly appears, its buildings standing white against the dark green of the landscape. It is a delightful surprise to the visitor—so quickly has he been transported from the nervous hurry of the modern city to this quiet, slow-moving life, with so much that elsewhere has long since been outmoded.

Scattered along the roadside beyond Baie 21 de Wasig appear log and tar-paper houses, some all but hidden in their wooded surroundings. Children play about the yards, women wash or weave baskets, while men in doorways sit puffing on their pipes. Between two tar-paper houses a rough road strikes off into the woods about fifteen miles from Baie de Wasig, which leads to the Osborn camp and the University of Michigan property. Despite the fact that it is the roughest road I have ever traveled, all who have taken it feel perfectly recompensed for any discomforts, because, as it winds its way toward the river, the forest grows dense and cool and the variety of trees and shrubs and flowering plants increases, until one forgets himself in the beauty of the place. The road ends in a large opening sprinkled with blueberry bushes, June plum, and pin-cherry trees, all guarded by giant white pines and Norway pines.

At one side, screened from view by trees and shrubs, is the log lodge where we were to live. Because it is the largest of the three log buildings which Governor Osborn has built, he calls it "the Gander"; the other two bear the names "Little Duck" and "Big Duck." The Gander faces east on a rock-strewn elevation about fifty feet back from the St. Mary's River. It is seventy feet long by twenty-five feet wide, with a porch across the entire length of the east side. In the center a ten-foot open airway divides it into two parts, of which the north section has one room with two balconies, and is warmed by a massive stone fireplace where swallows nest. The south section has two rooms, the smaller of which is the kitchen, while the larger serves as a living-room, bedroom, and workroom combined. Here a Finnish brick stove furnishes warmth. Each of these rooms, too, has a balcony which may be used for sleeping quarters or for storing baggage. Surrounding the Gander is a heavy growth of fir and birch that almost completely shuts it off from any outside view, while at the rear, leading off in several directions, trails wind their way around trees and over rocks, amid ferns and blueberry bushes. Some of these trails converge about three hundred yards distant on the south end of the peninsula, still known as Duck Island, where Governor Osborn has his summer camp. Other trails end on the shore of a small but picturesque body of water called Sweet Gail, near the center of which rises a lovely little wooded island where birds of great variety find a perfect place to congregate.

The evening of our arrival was dark, delightfully cool, and quiet. We sat on the large screened porch with Professor Willett Ramsdell and his daughter, who had arrived the previous day, and watched the eastern horizon grow bright through a screen of black pine boughs. Soon a great silver moon moved slowly up over the hills of the Canadian shore and splashed its rays upon the ripples of the river, breaking its dark surface into millions of fragments. Long into the evening this moving scene of silver held us and we wished we might remain longer, but we were to be received by the Governor in the morning, and as he is up and about hours before the sun, we knew we must make our call early.

I had never met the man nor had occasion to see him, but I had heard a great deal about him, had read his books, and had heard him talk over the radio. I knew his position among men and in the State. Somehow my mental picture of him had strangely taken on the form of some legendary character such as might be found in some old leather-bound book—a rugged old prophet standing on a mountaintop, calmly viewing the vast procession of human thought and emotion, at times with disappointment, or again with approval or amusement, but always with sympathetic understanding, on occasion coming among men to speak to them from out his long life of rich experience.

When we met him the next morning on the porch of Little Duck, we found a very real person with a kindly smile and hand-clasp that evidenced real friendliness. After greeting us, and while waving us to seats, he said, speaking rapidly, “Mr. Angell, 22 you think you're a sculptor?” I replied that I do the best I know. “I admire your honesty,” he said, and continuing, “Well, some men are sculptors in stone and bronze, while others are sculptors of men.” Then he excused himself, saying that he was right in the midst of looking up something pertaining to the human gullet or esophagus.

EAST NEBISH ISLAND A glimpse from the river.

Hurrying into the cabin he opened his encyclopedia and read aloud the information he was seeking. Hardly had he finished reading when he launched into the history of the Angell family in America, going back as far as the Roger Williams expedition of 1631 which brought Thomas Angell to Boston. He asked many questions about my work, questions which I knew came from a comprehensive knowledge of the subject. As we were about to leave he said, “Well, Angell, you're here. You have a task to perform. As for myself, I don't like it, but you never mind. We are going to have a good time. I will co-operate to the limit.” As Professor Ramsdell and I went down the trail toward the Gander, the day seemed warm and lovely, the whole world had taken on a mantle of newness, and I felt a keen urge to be at work.

The next few days were busy ones. The first sitting was to be at eight o'clock next morning, and before that time an armature had to be put together and many pounds of plasteline rolled into small balls and pressed firmly upon the armature to prepare a basic mass, to which more plasteline would

be added to produce the final form. Then this bulky plasteline-encased armature and fifty more pounds of plasteline, an iron modeling stand, tools, and other equipment had to be taken to a boat and transported up the river to Duck Island and thence to the Governor's library. This 23 library, which houses about seven thousand volumes and many art treasures, is about fifty by twenty-five feet, constructed of cement and steel, with iron shutters and a heavy iron door.

Next morning, a half hour before the time appointed, I was at the library to make sure all would be in readiness when the Governor arrived. He came at eight, dressed in faded khaki shorts, loose shirt open at the neck, and sleeves rolled to the elbows, with cotton socks and ankle-high tennis shoes on his feet. After a good morning and a few pleasantries I asked him to be comfortably seated so that I might proceed. He perched himself on the top of a three-foot library ladder, as uncomfortable a place as he could have chosen, it seemed to me, but he proved more than equal to it. In fact two hours passed before either of us thought to look at a watch. In his delightful descriptive manner he took me to faraway places and among strange peoples—pages of travel he turned, as it were, revealing on each a picture of thrilling adventure, beauty, or some outstanding personality.

MOONLIGHT OVER THE RIVER From the "Gander."

At the beginning the portrait strangely resembled Washington. At first I could not account for it, but on analyzing my first impressions of the Governor—that great rugged head with protruding, square chin, firm but pleasant mouth, convex nose, eyes that calmly search the depths of men and things, under a high forehead crowned by thinning white hair combed back and falling in waves to the nape of a muscular neck firmly wedged between broad shoulders and a powerful chest, all held very erect on a strong spine—in all of them I saw Washington. It was a week or more before my Washington began slowly to resemble Chase S. Osborn.

In the days and weeks that followed I saw much of him, while I worked. He fidgeted, anxious to be at his own tasks. He swatted flies while telling of his meetings with the world's great artists, poets, and statesmen — men whom I knew only by their work. He talked also of art. "Art is a link which connects us with men and things of the past — Egyptians, Greeks, Mayas," he would say. "We are brothers and heirs." The Governor is a keen critic of the arts and expresses a fondness for the Oriental; he possesses two fine Buddhistic heads carved in greystone, secured during one of his sojourns in China.

Something about his young thoroughbred Chippewa boy, Gib, reminded him of David of the Psalms. He inquired of Gib if he had ever heard of David. Gib had not. 24 Thereupon the Governor, in his own unique manner and with colloquial expressions familiar to his listener, related the battle scene

between David and Goliath. I had never heard the story more beautifully told, with more simplicity, clarity, or effectiveness.

Though many years separate Governor Osborn from his active participation in business and politics, he is a very busy man, occupied with writing, speaking, and a large correspondence. Sacks of mail come up the river to him each week, and each letter is answered promptly. The camp is run on "Osborn time," which means up before the sun and to bed with the chickens. It is run also with the precision of an army camp—everything has its place and everything must be in its place. I am told that orderliness and readiness are habits long established with him. He once told me that he keeps things in such order at all times that at a moment's notice he can pick up and go. Trips are planned according to schedule, meals are served on the minute, there is no disturbing sound of telephone or radio, not a cent is wasted on unnecessaries and not a dollar saved at the expense of comfort.

Little Duck is his workshop. It is a one-room log building with a large stone fireplace, on either side of which is piled about a cord of very dry wood. Hunting and fishing equipment line the walls, with desks and a typewriter stationed in a corner between two windows. Bottles of ink, pens and pencils, stacks of letters, books, magazines, and letter files give an air of business, while comfortable chairs and the odor of burning wood on the hearth bring relaxation.

Fifty feet from Little Duck is a tent in which the Governor sleeps. His bed is made of the tips of balsam boughs placed on end at a ninety-degree angle, within a bed-sized rectangle formed by four small logs. This cushion of balsam is covered with canvas and buffalo robes. The bed is rebuilt each year by his Indian boy, and renewed two or three times during the summer with fresh balsam. At the end of each camping season the balsam tips are taken out and scattered over near-by paths, which have become soft as the softest carpet.

Some seventy yards south of Little Duck is Big Duck cabin. Here are the kitchen, dining-room, guest quarters, and a great living-room, at the north end of which a massive stone fireplace is built into the log wall. Opposite, beside a large south window and cushioned window seat, is a big round table on which one finds the most recent magazines, papers, and pamphlets, all in order. Comfortable chairs are at the table, an antique horizontal stove rests in a sandbox near the front door, and easy rockers fill the vacant corners. Everything is old and well worn, log walls browned with age, stone fireplace smudged from the burning of many pine logs, but about it all spreads an atmosphere of quiet restfulness.

Though it is isolated, many visitors find their way to the Osborn camp. Some follow the trails, some arrive in rowboats, others come in large, luxurious yachts, but the Governor makes no distinctions, friends are still friends, poor or rich they are all alike to him. Though little traffic is now seen on the

east channel of the St. Marys River, hardly a day passes that some craft or other does not steam up the river and with whistle or kerchief offer a salute to the Governor. If he is in camp he will seize whatever is at hand, find an opening in the trees, and acknowledge their courtesy.

He shows his fondness for folks—plain honest folks—in the many ways in which he tries to assist them; he demands their best, pays their price, and exhibits great satisfaction over the transaction. A farmer with his small son and daughter calls each week from four or five miles up the river with a little rowboat loaded down with all kinds of freshly gathered flowers, vegetables, and eggs. The Governor will purchase half this load, and give the children each a dime to see their faces light up. Since he has only four in his household I often wonder what becomes of those vegetables.

Many years ago the clearing occupied 25 now by the Osborn camp was a camping ground of Indians. Then came logging days, and a great dock was built out over the water; later the dock was piled high with iron ore taken from a ship that had gone aground. One day long ago the dock collapsed under the weight, and for forty years, so the Governor tells me, he has been retrieving the chunks of black metal from the water. Today, outlining the porch of Little Duck and sparkling in the sunlight, are about two tons of this ore. Should

“BIG DUCK” Chase Osborn's living quarters, with “Little Duck,” his workshop, in the distance.

a visitor observe it and express an interest in it, he is very apt to be given a piece to carry away. Surely no more appropriate memento could be had from the “Iron Hunter.”

Before the completion of the bust Mr. Osborn left for Boston to fill speaking engagements, arranging with his Indian boy, Gib, to care for our needs. This gave us an opportunity to acquaint ourselves with the island, to catch a few big northern pike, pick blueberries, tramp old Indian trails, visit beaver dams, search for Indian baskets, and go to a few of the beautiful little islands that dot the river near by. One of these islands, East Nebish, lying close by the Canadian shore, can be seen from the Gander. From the time we arrived we were greatly interested in this island and anxiously awaited the time when we could explore it. From the Gander it appeared to be formed of gray-green rock, sparsely covered with wind-twisted, undernourished conifers, birch, and poplar, but as we approached nearer, the rocks grew to enormous proportions, and their gray-green color changed to delicate, vibrant tones of yellow, blue-green, and blue. We discovered, also, that these colors were not of the rocks but of the mosses and lichens which almost completely encase them. Where rock is exposed it takes on a variety of delicate yellows, pinks, and blues, and very often large areas are splashed with vivid reds and blues. The rocks seem to have been hollowed out by ripples or waves, creating little valleys in which rich soil has accumulated, so that now, in these protected spots, in cradles of rock, as it were, are nature's flower gardens, yellow, pink, and white. At the south end is a large abandoned stone quarry, where the quarry workers' buildings have been taken over by the Boy

Scouts for a summer camp, named 26 in honor of the Governor. Of all the islands we visited none seemed quite to compare with East Nebish for its color and rugged beauty, as well as for its tests of agility and physical stamina.

A wonderful week of exploration passed, and the flag was again raised over the camp to signify the Governor's presence. Work on the portrait was resumed, although only a few measurements and other minor details remained to be done at a final sitting. When I announced it was finished, the Governor stood looking thoughtfully at the bust. "Well, I declare, I feel that looks like me!" and then immediately, with a twinkle in his eye, "But what a rugged customer he is!" With the help of Gib, I gently moved the bust outside the library door into stronger light, and there photographs were made of it. Everyone in the camp seemed happy about it, the Governor most of all, for, thought he to himself, that's another grand job out of the way.

The bust was moved back into the library, and furniture, books, and bookcases were covered with tarpaulins. The bust was then completely covered with about two inches of plaster of Paris, reinforced with burlap. This formed the negative or mold, into which more plaster would later be poured to produce a perfect replica of the clay model. The mold complete, it was then removed from the clay, and the clay was taken from the armature and packed into metal cans. The molds and equipment were then transported down the river to the Gander, where they were packed in large wooden boxes and shipped to the University Museums.

In the late afternoon on the day previous to leaving Sugar Island, Mrs. Angell and I were preparing our baggage on the porch of the Gander, when we heard calls coming from the direction of Duck Island. They continued, growing more and more distinct. Then we recognized the voice as one we had so often heard in the stillness of the early morning. Breakfast at the Governor's camp is served soon after sunup, and as he makes it one of his chores to see that everyone is up and ready, it was his call we often heard in the morning, rousing those guests sleeping on his little houseboat, "The Water Bug," which is anchored in the river.

Soon we saw the Governor with his daughter coming down the trail through the pines, on seeing us, waving both arms, he shouted, "Hello, what are you folks up to?" We showed them our big boxes of plaster molds, and the hollowed logs filled with native plants which we were taking back with us. "We are sorry to have you folks leave us," he said, "but now there is a fish dinner ready and waiting, and we have come to take you both back to share it with us. We must leave immediately as everything is now ready to be served." In spite of the Governor's pretence of impatience at delay, we washed and brushed up a bit, then were on the trail, and soon at Big Duck cabin.

Friends of the Governor's were there from the south, a professor of botany and his wife. The professor had gone out into the forest the day previous to do a little botanizing, and in the maze of trails that cover Sugar Island had become lost. Searching parties were out most of the day looking for him. Toward dusk the old gentleman appeared at a house near the Governor's camp, very tired and thirsty but otherwise in perfect health. This experience, fortunately not serious, made the evening one for rejoicing.

Dinner was ready and we were directed to the dining room soon after arriving. The Governor, believing in God, precedes each meal with a blessing. He addresses God as "Father and Mother of the Earth," and with great reverence and feeling he weaves his supplications into phrases of poetic beauty, thanking God for the sunlight, the earth, and all it yields, for sleep, and for the renewing of life and courage. He wishes men to be in harmony with divine purpose, and asks for patience, understanding, and justice. It was wonderful to be there, and I know that those who have had the privilege of sitting at his table and 27 hearing his blessing will never forget its beauty and sincerity.

Following the blessing, the Governor personally did the serving; the food was excellent and the conversation delightful. The talk carried on into the living room. The Governor retires at seven, and he was astonished to find it already much later. Thereupon, taking his big sombrero from a wooden peg on the wall, and with sweeping gesture, bowing low like a court gentleman of old, he bade us all good evening.

Last summer Carleton W. Angell, who is sculptor on the staff of the University Museums, was commissioned to make a bust of former governor Chase S. Osborn. His weeks on Duck Island, the Osborn summer home, which is now part of the property given by Governor Osborn to the University, proved profitable in more ways than one as the readers of *The Laird of Duck Island* will realize. The bust, a drawing of which by Mr. Angell precedes the article, is now in Alumni Memorial Hall.

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AN EPISODE IN BABYLON

A Tenth Century Struggle for Politically Uncontrolled Schools and Religious Life

By Bernard Heller



WHAT may seem an ordinary episode is often fraught with implications whose full import longer be separated without serious damage to their constituents. In their present condition, these lumps sometimes afford curiously suggestive combinations; as, for instance, when you