

**Early Adventures at
Put-in-Bay,
Middle Bass
and Johnson's Island**

True Historical Narratives from 1786-1865

Michael Gora

Early Adventures at Put-in-Bay, Middle Bass and Johnson's Island
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Cover Note: The two images on the bottom of the cover show Put-in-Bay harbor around 1865. In the image on the left, the black ship near the left edge is the USS Michigan. The USS Michigan was the first iron-hulled warship in the U.S. Navy and is mentioned several times in this book.

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ISBN 978-1-4357-1558-5

Foreword

When Mike Gora came to me and said he had found evidence that Put-in-Bay was originally on Middle Bass Island I thought I had misunderstood him. How could that be? Put-in-Bay is on South Bass Island and always has been or so it was believed. He asked me to take a look at the evidence and give my opinion. After carefully reading it I find I must agree with him – Put-in-Bay was originally on Middle Bass. How it ended up on South Bass is still a mystery but one that I'm sure Mike will solve in the future.

Mike has a talent for finding little known bits of history that have fallen by the wayside. Whenever I get a call from him I know it will be interesting! He's willing to take the time, bear the expense and put forth the effort to bring it to the attention of others. Unlike many so-called historians, Mike does not assume anything. He bases his conclusions on the facts and evidence before him even if the conclusion is not what he hoped for. That is what makes him a true historian. He is loyal to the history as it is rather than to what he wants it to be.

With this book Mike again fills in a gap in the rich history of our fascinating islands.

Barbara Cooper
Island Historian
Author, *Hotel Victory*

Introduction

As I became more deeply aware of the early history of the Lake Erie Islands, I was surprised by some of the maps, stories and pictures that I found because they were mostly unknown to the public at large. They had certainly never been assembled before into readily available material. The number of long forgotten items that others have overlooked was greater than I expected.

The stories in this book provide an important historical picture of what travelers to the Lake Erie Islands encountered in the 18th and early 19th centuries. I believe they are also interesting to a larger set of readers who would like answers to the following questions:

- Could Put-in-Bay harbor have been located on Middle Bass Island in the 18th century, and not on South Bass Island?
- Why were the Lake Erie Islands called the “Isles of Terror”?
- Who found the dead body of a French trader on North Bass Island in 1793 and buried it there?
- What occasion led to singing accompanied by flute music in a cavern in Put-in-Bay in 1819?
- How was Johnson’s Island selected for the prison there during the Civil War?
- What was life like for the Confederate soldiers imprisoned on Johnson’s Island?
- What did John Yates Beall, the “Pirate of Lake Erie”, look like?
- Why did many visitors who intended to stop on the Lake Erie Islands only once during a lake crossing end up coming back several times?

When reading the stories, it is useful to keep in mind that northwest Ohio was part of the American Frontier from the 1780s through the middle of the 19th century, when the Gold Rush of 1849 permanently moved the “American West” to the Pacific coast. The first “fable” figures of the U.S., including Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett and others, all came from east of the Mississippi. Roughly half of this book contains stories from the early “Frontier” period of Ohio.

Two of the sections in this book, those about Major Joseph Delafield and about John Yates Beall, appeared in a shorter form in my 2004 book *Lake Erie Islands: Sketches and Stories*. They have been expanded considerably in this

book to complete the stories. In addition, this book is the first ever to publish a picture of John Yates Beall, the “Pirate of Lake Erie”, which was taken before he entered military service.

The material in this book comes from many obscure sources. Two of the articles, plus some of the material about John Yates Beall, were found on the Internet. Five of the articles came from original print versions of old newspapers from the first half of the nineteenth century, newspapers that have not been put on the web yet. The articles by Zeisberger, Simcoe, Evans, Delafield and Barziza came from fairly rare books that I was fortunate to get my hands on. The book with Spencer’s story was much easier to locate.

The records of island ownership by Pierpont Edwards and Henry Champion were obtained from the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, OH.

I obtained a microfilm copy of Zeisberger’s original 1786 diary after contact with the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, PA. That diary contained the original of the frequently cited reference to Put-in-Bay having been called Pudding Bay and I have included the original pages in an appendix to make them more readily available to researchers.

I would like to give thanks to a few of the people who assisted me in completing this book, viz., Robin Burris-Cadez, North Bass Island historian, Barb Cooper, former curator of the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society and author of *Hotel Victory* and Chad Waffan, author of *Ohio’s Lake Erie Islands*. Each provided invaluable ongoing assistance and help in reviewing the final draft. Dr. Morton O’Kelly, chair of the Geography Department at Ohio State University in Columbus, reviewed the final draft and provided valuable suggestions. Don Rhodes, Catawba Island historian, also got a look at an early copy. Even though Catawba Island had not been mentioned, he provided an important footnote to assure that it got in.

Michael Gora
Middle Bass Island, Ohio
March, 2008

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EARLY ADVENTURES AT PUT-IN-BAY, MIDDLE BASS AND JOHNSON'S ISLAND

About the Author

Michael Gora is the Middle Bass Island Historian for the Lake Erie Islands Historical Society. He also operates the Middle Bass Island website at www.middlebass.org which has placed many island photos on the web as well as a good bit of island history.

A retired software company executive and former software engineer, he has written over 30 technical articles and 3 technical books during a long career. More recently, he was the editor of *Lake Erie Islands: Sketches and Stories*, one of the largest compilations of island history. He was also the editor of the revised edition of *Lonz of Middle Bass*. His wife Jean has published a book with a true story of life and love on Put-in-Bay in the late 19th century, *My Sweetest Libbie*.

Michael is a long-time summer resident of Middle Bass Island. His wife's grandfather built a cottage there in the 1920s, and Michael and his wife built a new house there in 1997. When not on Middle Bass Island, he and his wife live on a remote mountaintop in Hayesville, western North Carolina, where much of this book was written.