



*(Top to bottom) Clearing for the foundation; Laying the doorstone;  
The house at Pretty Marsh; David & Michael McGiffert*

## A BOY IN SUMMER PRETTY MARSH, THE 1930'S

Michael McGiffert

Summer has meant Maine to me since I first became aware of seasons and places. And Maine has meant Mount Desert Island and, particularly, Pretty Marsh, for all or part of nearly every summer of my almost eighty years has been spent at that dear place on the island's western shore where, in 1930, Father and Mother bought from Mr. Allen Freeman fourteen-plus acres on the northwest side of Pretty Marsh Harbor. The property was spruce woods and fields, and on the water side a splendid stand of tall young oaks. Undergrowth there had been kept down by Mr. Freeman's sheep. The most prominent oak was an ancient dead one that held up gaunt arms on the edge of the bank above the rocky beach. I seem to recall Mr. Freeman, then in his seventies, saying that the Old Oak had begun to die when his father was a boy, but that may be a slip on my part or a stretch on his. Crows produced sunrise concerts on the remaining branches of that gray relic.

Some fifty yards up from the shore and backing against the woods, Father and Mother built a house – two-storied, gray-shingled, blue-shuttered, white-trimmed, not looking very large but with seven rooms: living room with a big fireplace (made by Mr. James Crockett, a veteran mason), combination kitchen and dining room, four bedrooms, two bathrooms each with a tub, a large attic, and a cold cellar. At the front door they planted lilacs; a slab of gray granite, hauled by horse from a long-abandoned farmhouse on West Point, made a noble doorstep.

I say my parents built the house, but in fact Mr. Freeman did it with his sons and local men, working to their design. They also put up a detached shed for the well pump; wood for the kitchen stove was kept there: bringing in the small logs was one of the children's daily chores. We carried them in a pile, as many as we could hold on two bent arms, taking care to place a smooth birch log at the bottom of the pile, where elbows creased, and not a scratchy spruce one. We sang out, "Open the

door! Open the door!” to let whoever was in the kitchen know we were coming with no hands free.

A short walk away under the oaks through blueberry patch and field, Mr. Freeman put up two cabins – a small one as a study for Father; another smaller still as an after-lunch naptime retreat for Mother. Family feet soon wore a path from the house to the first, about a hundred yards away, and on through blueberries and woods to the second. One summer, the steady wearing-down of the path produced an Indian arrowhead, but I have since suspected that Father planted the thing; at any rate, *he* found it.

Life was simple. At least it seemed so to a kid. Looking back, I'm struck instead by the do-it-yourself complexity of daily living. It was thirty years before today's taken-for-granted conveniences were installed – not till Father retired and Father and Mother began to come earlier in the spring and stay later into the fall, making Pretty Marsh their principal home. Before then, there was no electricity; Coleman and kerosene lamps provided light; flashlights or candles lit the way to bed. No



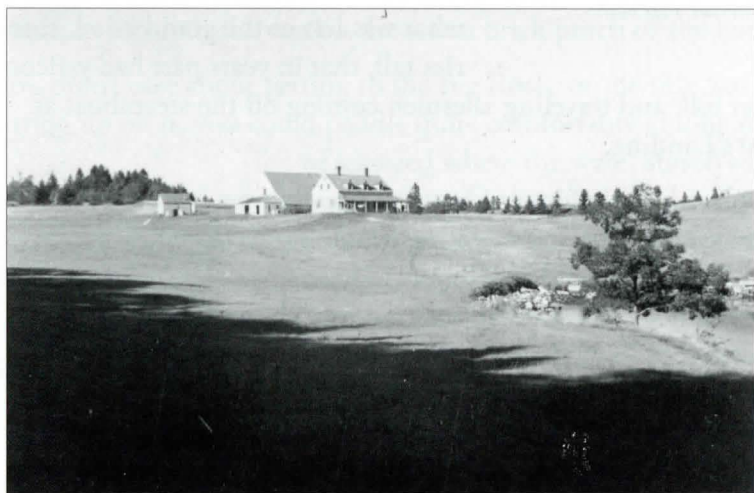
*First drink at the new well: David, Mother, cousin Paul Fremont-Smith and Father*

telephone. No refrigerator; some perishables were kept in a dumb waiter that a strong arm could draw up from a concrete box under the kitchen floor; others, like fresh milk from Mr. Richardson's dairy farm near Somesville, were kept in the cellar, which was cooled by a great

tank of water from our deep-drilled well.

The main concession to modernity was indoor plumbing (put in by Mr. Wendell Gilley) and running water. Each morning, Father hand-cranked the gasoline engine that powered the pump that supplied the tank; the handle was stiff and had quite a kick. The thing would usually start if you caught the kick just right, but this was not a small boy's job. The cellar housed a wood furnace, and Mother cooked on a big black stove, which also heated water in a big copper boiler for washing and bathing. The washing machine had a wringer you turned by hand.

Perhaps at no time since the first settlers moved in and the last Indians moved out for good had Pretty Marsh Harbor been so empty of human presence as in the 1930s. When we weren't there, Mr. and Mrs. Freeman had it all to themselves. They lived in the big farmhouse at the harbor's head. A path led to their house from ours through fields



*Allen & Nancy Freeman's farm*

and woods, wide enough in the woods for Mr. Freeman's wagon to get through. It was a city child's delight that the Freemans had a horse, a cow, sometimes a pig, chickens (I still recall, too vividly, the day that Mr. Freeman chopped a rooster's head off with a hatchet and the rest of it ran around the barnyard), a big redolent barn, a vegetable garden, and an expanse of hay meadow sloping to the shore.

The Freemans' dim front parlor had an old and creaky foot-pump organ that children were allowed to play when their feet could reach the pedals. The parlor was always cool, but Mrs. Freeman's kitchen was

always warm. Her name was Nancy, but we called her Fee and we loved her. There the Freemans raised two sons, Allen Jr. and Pearl, and a daughter, Catherine, who was what was not yet called a teenager



*Catherine Freeman*

and who helped out Mother as what was not yet called a baby-sitter. Later in the decade, the Godings from New Jersey built a small white summer place on what had been a high piece of Freeman shorefront.

Other people there were none: no one across the half-mile harbor; no one on West Point, where buildings stood decaying, with apples from the unpicked trees rotting where they fell; no one on the harbor's two small northern points. Up the field from one of those points stood what was left of the grand hotel, three stories tall, that in years past had welcomed

summer folk and traveling salesmen coming off the steamboat at Bartlett's Landing.

The place had gone out of business quite a time before, but on long summer evenings parties of young people gathered there to dance and drink. The ruinous old building, windows open to the weather, plaster half on the floor, stairs collapsing, was our Haunted House. Now the site is only a few overgrown cellar holes when sheds once stood, but even then the place seemed a ghostly vestige of a time, incalculably long ago, when Pretty Marsh had been a bustling place.

Back then, one of Mr. Freeman's forebears had thought of developing woodland overlooking Bartlett's Narrows north of the landing road. That was in the 1880s or thereabouts. The plan survives in a professionally drawn plat of streets and lots that imposes mind on matter with a strictly geometrical disregard for the area's rugged topography. The stones of the local graveyard attest that Freemans had once been numerous at Pretty Marsh. In the 1930s, only one family remained. Now there are none.

It was quiet then. So quiet that seals sunned themselves on West Point's inner reef. One summer, someone made a sturdy little raft and moored it by the Old Oak for seals to haul out on, and one did. Below

Father's cabin, we had a swimming place where a great boulder, a glacial erratic, stood with just its top out of water at high tide, far enough from shore to swim to, if you were active and quick, before you froze. The swimming place was round the shore and out of sight of the Freeman farm and the Godings, and since no one else lived on the harbor when the McGiffert offspring were very young, the family swam naked.

And wasn't that water cold! – as each and all exclaimed, every time, going in. You could go in fast and splash to the Big Rock and haul yourself up on top by a kind of ledge on one side, taking care to avoid the barnacles. Or you could go in a toe at a time and shiver in the shallows until you had to get out or go on because your feet were getting numb. On top of the Big Rock, with two or three kids crowding together, you had to decide, when the shivering stopped, how to get back: dive off (deep water on the outer side), or hold your nose and jump, or inch off on your seat. In any case, a second cold shock and a quick thrash back to dry towels and sun-warmed flat slabs of granite, and, if it was noon, to lunch in the sun on the warm brick porch of the house.

If you didn't care about getting to the Big Rock, or the tide was wrong for getting up on it, you could paddle quite comfortably among the tops of seaweed where the water stayed sort of warm. Or you could loll in an inner tube and not go anywhere in particular but mostly round and round; that way, only your bottom got cold. (It was on this bit of shore, years later, that Bob Lincoln, while building an addition to the larger of the two cabins, found and took home the stranded seal pup that our cousin Nan Lincoln christened Cecily and wrote books about.)



*David in the wading pool*

Sometimes, for a change, we swam (with suits) at the gravelly beach on West Point facing Bartlett's Island. For the littlest, Father dug a small, shallow pool in front of the house and lined it with concrete for paddling in with toy boats.

There were few boaters then: it was the Depression; cruising only took hold after the War. The harbor seemed entirely our own, for the summers of childhood – ours, along with seals, gulls and loons, an

osprey fishing, mussels for the picking on our shore, clams we dug out of the mud near the Big Rock, and flounder that could be caught with a clam for bait if you sat very still for quite a long time in a rowboat with a line overboard and a forefinger on the line waiting for the tiny tremor of a bite. Like as not, the biter turned out to be a sculpin, God's ugliest fish, which Father threw back after whacking it against the gunwale to stun it long enough (he said) to keep it from biting soon again. One summer evening, the herring came in, and the herring fishermen came after them; the night of hauling nets left a shining carpet of silver smelts along the shore in the morning.

We sailed the family boat – a day-sailer sloop with a centerboard named the *Jonathan* after Jonathan Edwards, the colonial New England



*The Jonathan*

minister who was the subject of Father's first book. Much of the book was written in his cabin study; the royalties paid for the boat. The *Jonathan* took us to picnics on Folly Island, on Hardwood Island at Sand Dollar Beach, on Bartlett's Island at Dogfish Cove or Appletree Cove (it's the one that looks straight out at Folly; a single rogue apple tree used to grow just above the beach), always with a watchful eye to the wind to see if it would hold for getting home in the afternoon so as not to have to row. The *Jonathan* had no motor. Boats with motors, work boats of course always excepted, were not well

regarded by Mother and Father, though a neighborly exception was made for young Arthur Goding's putt-putt.

We learned to sail. Father taught us to handle the *Jonathan* – patiently calling attention to a luffing main or a waggly wake. Because getting out of the harbor took a few tacks against the prevailing southwest wind, it was a point of skill to be economical and exact: keep the boat headed tight to the wind; keep the sail full; keep the line straight. Coming home was faster (and warmer) with the wind astern, the sail bellying, the boat steady, and the chance of jibing by mistake the only thing to watch out for. Then you could lean over the side, reach down into green water, and try to grab white jellyfish or odd bits of sea wrack.

We did a lot of rowing. The rowboat, usually a stable flat-bottomed

one but sometimes round-bottomed and tippy, was kept moored in front of Father's cabin. The rig was simple. At the start of each summer, someone with a strong back picked a piece of granite on the shore heavy enough to keep the mooring in place. The mooring was a flat wooden triangle, painted green, with a pulley fixed on one side and a continuous line – the outhaul line – run through the pulley. On the shore side, the line was kept looped around a boulder at the edge of the bank above the beach. After tying the triangle to the rock anchor with a long line, Father and one or both sons would row out and drop the rock off the stern so that the triangle lay on the surface of the water several feet beyond low-tide mark. Back on shore, you fastened the boat to the outhaul line with a snaffle. Then, standing at the boulder, you pulled the boat out to the mooring.

A favorite place for rowing to was the nearer of the northern points, which we named Pirates Point, a name that now appears on some local maps. From there, we could explore the Haunted House (with strict injunctions to stay off the dangerously decrepit stairs). One late summer day, my sister and I buried pirate treasure at the Point – new-fallen green acorns in a Guarantee Chocolates box. Chores included the disposing of used tin cans and bottles, usually by one of the kids in the middle of the harbor. Ecology was unknown then, and there was no town trash collection. I can still see the silvery, slivery gleam of a tin can lid slanting this way, that way, down, down, till just a glimmer and then gone. Partly filled bottles pushed bottom first into the water hard enough so they wouldn't bob right up again went down with a satisfying series of receding glubs and bubbles. We also rowed out of the harbor around West Point to Robinson Crusoe Island (John's Island on the chart), a few square feet of ledge, rank grass, and a scraggly tree or two. At the highest point of that bump of land my sister and I buried a secret message in a bottle that we never found again, although we made a secret map for finding it. All this messing about in boats was done with life-jackets on, until the day came when you could swim (a parent rowing alongside) from the Old Oak to Pirates Point at high tide – a distance of at most a hundred yards. The reward: you were declared seaworthy for messing about in boats without a life-jacket. A sturdy pocket watch was also awarded.

We used to come early in the season, as soon as school let out in Chicago, sometimes driving but usually by train in the days when you could go all the way by rail to Ellsworth, riding backwards from Bangor



because, for reasons then unclear to me, that was how it was. A car was stored on the Island for summer use – a Model A Ford, light gray-green, with a convertible canvas top, running boards made right for kids to stand on, and a horn that went AH-OO-GA. Because the driveway got a little steep near the bottom, and because the ground behind the house could get muddy, AH-OO-GA was usually left part way up the road, with everyone carrying groceries from there – groceries bought at Fernald’s old store in the middle of Somesville – old even then – where Mr. A. C. Fernald presided with a dignity that made him seem even taller than he was.



*AH-OO-GA*

We came early and stayed late, often into early October – that is, Mother and the children did, the late departure being possible because we went to the University of Chicago’s Laboratory School, which had a shorter year than the public schools. Father could not usually stay that long, and professional duties called him away from time to time during the summer. Or so I’m told; I don’t remember this; in memory, the family is always together: Father, Mother, my two-years-older brother, David, my four-and-a-half-years-younger sister, Ellen, and Waggie, our eager, affectionate black cocker spaniel with the perpetual-motion tail, acquired as a puppy the year of Ellen’s birth. And there were cats – summer boarders, really – one of which produced kittens. It was not that cat but another one that the historian Samuel Eliot Morison, summering nearby at Sawyer’s Cove, took along as ship’s mascot for one of his transatlantic voyages tracing the route of Christopher Columbus.

I've made the place sound more remote, and the family more self-absorbed, than either really was. One of the reasons Father and Mother liked Pretty Marsh was that it was near enough to Mother's family's summer home at Northeast Harbor, where she had grown up summers, to be sociable, while far enough away to be itself. There was actually a pretty steady coming and going between Pretty Marsh and Asticou, as my grandparents' place was called. Young cousins often spent a week or more with us; we made frequent visits over there. Two or three times a summer, there was Sunday dinner on the piazza at Asticou after church



*Ellen, David & Michael at Asticou, Northeast Harbor*

– chicken and rice, something green, peach ice cream, and remote adult table conversation. Father and Grandpa were ministers; we might have heard one preach that morning at the Congregational church in Somesville or the other at Northeast Harbor's Union Church.

Each summer there was the Great Annual Family Picnic on Baker's Island, with three generations in the party. Sometimes a visit to the Seal Harbor Club or a dip and a picnic at Sand Beach, then quite uncrowded even on dog days. Now and then a mountain climbing expedition with large and small relatives stringing out behind wearing sweaters round their hips, and squares of dark bittersweet Baker's chocolate at the top. Once there was a deep-sea fishing excursion, which Mother and Father's second son managed to make memorable (the boat's engine being smelly and the swells swelly) by becoming sick and throwing up. "The marmalade tastes best," my emptied small self is said to have said when finally back on the Seal Harbor dock.



*En route to the Great Picnic on Baker's Island*

One or two summers, the Hampton Institute singers came from Virginia to Northeast Harbor to sing spirituals on great-uncle Frank Peabody's lawn: the harmony was close and the bass always rich and deep. As a young man, Grandpa had taught a semester at Hampton.

I am told, but don't remember anything about it, that brother Dave and I helped celebrate one of Grandpa's birthdays by dressing up as Indians and doing "Indian" dances on Asticou's big porch looking out toward Bear Island and the Great Harbor. Grandpa was very interested in Indians. Though I don't remember dancing, I certainly do remember the Indian suit. It was a light-brown costume with a headdress of big bright feathers. That headdress was made for the Great Plains, not the Maine woods, but that didn't matter at all. I wore the war bonnet



*A family gathering in Northeast Harbor;  
Mother is at far right*

all day long all one summer and would have worn it to bed if the feathers hadn't been stiff and scratchy. One summer we made a little wigwam out of sticks up the slope of woods behind the house, like Eeyore's house in the Shepard drawings for the A. A. Milne stories.

Up the slope from the wigwam, Father later built a two-level treehouse. The wigwam was too small for sleeping in, and the treehouse was considered unsafe at night; but more than once I slept in a pup tent under oaks a little off from the house, which seemed far away after dark. I also had a cowboy suit, and Mother stitched up a splendid black and white skull-and-crossbones flag for being pirates. And speaking of Milne, I must not fail to recall playing Pooh Sticks when still very young, with Mother, where the Bartlett's Landing road crosses the inlet below the graveyard; there's a culvert under the road now, but then there

was a stone bridge just right for the game, which could be played either way, depending on which way the tide was running.

There were children nearby, with games of their own, in which we had some part. Maisie and Lewis Smallidge's three oldest were growing up at Pretty Marsh corner. Gail and Joanne Hysom lived across the road from the Smallidges. Others – the Goding kids, Albert Stork, Ida Leonard – were in my young picture, though on the edge of it. On



*Winter on the island: David, Michael with skis,  
Ellen in front*

the whole, though, the gap between local and summer, between kids at home and kids from away, was too wide to be bridged by a few hours' play. Besides, I was shy, and some of the kids were older (the oldest and

farthest away was Nathan Preston), and several were *girls*.

The gap was also there one fall when Father had sabbatical leave and we stayed through Christmas and I went to third grade at Somesville in the yellow building that now houses apartments. I sat at the back of the room with the other third graders listening to the first and second grade kids recite up front. I remember softball on the school field. I remember falling in love. At age eight I was evidently ready for love, and Althea was it. But Althea, blond, quick, and sharp-tongued, thought as little of boys – of me, at any rate – as I thought of every girl but her: so I was left to adore from afar.

Summers were punctuated by events that have cut deep grooves in memory. At haying time, Mr. Freeman, gruff and kind, let us “help” with the haying by riding high in his big blue wagon, pulled by one horse, and by bouncing and burrowing in the hayloft of his barn – a proper barn with swooping swallows and the rich smell of old wood and manure – until he got to worrying about the risk of fire from compacting the hay or we got too much haydust up our noses.



*Haying with the Freemans*

Speaking of fire, I seem to recall a small one, once, in the field in front of our house, but it was quickly put out. Not put-outable was the blaze that burned down the Godings’ house the summer I was eight or nine. It was supposed that Mr. Goding had left a lit pipe in his jacket pocket when he put it in the closet. The place could not be saved. I didn’t notice who tried to save it because I was busy contributing to the effort on my own. I’d been told that flame went out when deprived of air. My contribution to the fire fighting was to place a galvanized bucket upside down over sparks that landed in the Freemans’ field and then sit on that bucket to keep the air out until the sparks died. The field did not burn.

And there was always the Fourth of July – gloriously celebrated with sparklers, torpedoes, rockets, Roman candles, a Vesuvius Fountain, a Catherine Wheel, and firecrackers ranging from strings of little Chinese snappers to blockbuster cherry bombs with which Dave and I tried,

with true persistence but small success, to blow seedling spruces out of the ground. (The spruces had to be pulled up by hand each summer anyway to keep the field clear, and blowing them up made good boys' sense.) There was no public exhibition of fireworks on the Island then, nor any laws against their private use. So we banged away in the afternoon with marble-sized torpedoes, which made a sharp report when whanged against a rock, touched off a firecracker now and then (but not when Mother was napping), and waited for evening and the dark to come.

The harbor at evening on July Fourth was always perfectly calm and glimmering with stars. The tide was always high, lapping the flat granite rocks at the Old Oak where, assembled at the long-awaited hour, we exploded the last torpedoes and crackers and then got on to the main business as dark fell. First, the sparklers; then the Roman candles, at least a half-dozen, which you held at one end at arm's length pointing up over the water, and Father lit the other end, and then, after a pause just long enough for someone to say, Oh, it's a dud, Bloop, out burst a something that became a red or green or white fireball in the night sky, and then, Bloop, another, and another, until at last, too soon, the Roman candle died. And there were rockets, shot from a wooden trough that Father made, arcing high, bursting in silver and gold and red and green and leaving a sharp smell behind. Vesuvius, set on a rock, poured up smoke and colored flame, but never quite lived up to expectations and sometimes only burped a puff or two and quit. The Catherine Wheel always worked, nailed to



*Father & Mother*

the Old Oak and whirling spirals of sparks, though never long enough.

Which was like the evening itself – as the bang of crackers gave way to the magic lights of candle and rocket, fountain and wheel, forever bright. Each rocket made a little distant “cush” when it hit the water, and the next morning one could gather the dead shafts washed up along the shore and sniff the afterscent of sweet acidity.

It was on those rocks at the Old Oak, one morning, that I tripped and fell and dislocated an elbow, which in those days put you into a body cast and out of commission for some time. Observant persons pointed out, more in sorrow than in censure, that my sneaker laces were untied. Another summer was marked by an attack of appendicitis, with an emergency run in AH-OO-GA to the Bar Harbor hospital, getting there just in time before the thing burst.

Parental cares were lightened, some summers, by young men – seminary students of Father’s – who looked after David and me as needed. One of them led us in blazing a trail through the woods from the lower meadow nearly all the way to the mailbox at the head of the driveway: one of our chores was getting the mail. One summer, Dave and I were part of an organized group of boys who did boyish things in woods and water. I can write of this today only because, one afternoon at the swimming place on the west side of Echo Lake, Dave saved me from drowning, as I believed then and believe now, by rushing in to pull me out when I had lost my footing on a slippery bottom rock and was going down in helpless choking panic for the third time.



*Three generations of McGifferts*

There were informative visitors and pursuits. From a professor of geology, who stayed a few days, I learned that there is more to know about the rocks of the shore than how to skip one or how to jump from one to another without breaking something. One or two summers were devoted to chasing after butterflies with a net – mostly cabbage butterflies or common red admirals but once in a lucky while a monarch or a tiger swallowtail. Another was wildflower summer, with a prize – a big flower picture book – for identi-

fying a certain number. Could it have been fifty? That seems unlikely, since the flowers of our fields were not numerous in kind: mostly buttercups, Indian and devil's paint brush, daisies, black-eyed Susans, purple asters, wild roses, Queen Anne's lace and its coarse cousin yarrow, and the goldenrod that told of coming fall.

A couple of years I planted and tended a vegetable garden that managed to produce from the thin soil a child-size harvest of lettuce, radishes, carrots, and chard. I suppose I must have helped pick blueberries for the family table – at their very best in Mother's blueberry pudding served with sugary-buttery hard sauce – but picking berries ranked on a par with stripping balsam needles for pillows, pretty low on a boy's list of pastimes, and I expect I ate as many as I picked.

There were always games and sports – simple ones, needing little equipment. We pitched horseshoes, shot arrows at a big straw target, and spent a lot of time playing a game called Loop Tennis that involved a hard rubber ball hung by a cord from a swivel atop a central pole, with a metal loop at each side of the court to hit the ball into, paddles for hitting it, and a couple of competitive small boys. Someone rigged a badminton net in the grass of the upper meadow. One summer, when cousins were visiting, Father and Mother thoughtfully instituted Camp Osprey, with an ongoing program of athletic contests.

Indoors, there were card games or board games – Parcheesi, Monopoly, checkers (regular and Chinese), sometimes a stab at chess. We played on the floor or on a sturdy black card table that came as a premium for eating a great many Guarantee Chocolates; at the rate of one piece per child after supper and only normal sneaking between meals, it must have taken two or three summers to accumulate enough coupons, box by box, to get that table. Seventy years later, it still serves. Father made a shuffleboard pattern on the green-painted floor of my bedroom; on our knees from about ten feet away, we slid the disks by hand – smooth round wooden ones, like hockey pucks.

It was perhaps because most days were filled with the activities generated by youthful energy and parental interest that I welcomed the relief of rain and the occasional embrace of fog. A gray day of showers and wind, when the harbor kicked up, the sailboat and rowboat bucked at their moorings, and the waves drove on shore was my kind of day. There would be a book, often a fire in the fireplace, the patter of rain on windows, and a quiet sense that nothing could get in and there was no



reason really to go out. There is something – quite a lot, I think – to be said for youthful quietude. Any resultant stuffiness in the head could be cured by taking a walk alone in the woods.

It was on such a damp day that I ran against the clock and in serial competition with other boys – Dave, certainly, for one; the others probably cousins – around a mile-long loop by the path to the cabins and along the gravelly beach to the dirt road to West Point at the “carry” where the senior Vaughans now have their place (so called because the road, not yet built up for cars, was covered at high tide), then along the Narrows to the paved road near the landing, and up the steep rise, panting, to our mailbox, and down our driveway through field and woods to the house. My recollection is of running wild through wet woods with fleet foot and light heart – running fast, faster than anyone else, faster than dreaming, never tripping. Perhaps the prompt for such exercise came from parents who, with everybody cooped up too long indoors by rainy weather, simply had to get those kids out of the house to have a little peace and quiet.

After Dave and I caught on to major-league baseball – for me at eight in 1937 – we spent three or four summers playing a full season’s schedule of games, using packs of cards that Father had bought for us. Each card had a ballplayer’s picture and a particular play: fly-out, strike-out, single, double, etc. Most, of course, were outs, but you could mix as many as you pleased of four kinds of hits along with bases on balls and errors depending on how high a score you wanted. One year Dave would take the National League, I the American; the next year, vice versa. Each played through the schedule solo, and at summer’s end we came together for the World Series. It was a sorry year when neither of our Chicago teams got itself into the Series, though I am pretty sure we tried not to fix the play of cards to favor them.

On those cards Chuck Klein (Phillies) hit a home-run, and Jimmy Foxx (Red Sox) hit a double. My favorite player’s card was only, unfairly, a pop-fly out. He was centerfielder Mike Kreevich, a miner’s son from the southern Illinois coalfields, and he was my guy because he was a White Sox and because he’d lost two fingers in a mining accident but mostly because he had my name at a time when the name wasn’t common if you weren’t Irish. Such a man surely deserved some kind of hit; even a single would have been enough.

In the evening, before bed, Mother read aloud – oh, loveliest of times,

for she read lovingly and well. I remember mostly books by British writers: Milne's verses and *Pooh* at first; later, the great Arthur Ransome and E. Nesbit stories, Dickens, George McDonald, *Bambi* and *Dr. Doolittle*, Kipling's *Just-So Stories* and *Jungle* books, *Wind in the Willows*, *Treasure Island*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Mary Poppins*, *Alice*, and so many more – books to cherish, some to become lifelong companions. And after the reading, as the dark came on, a hug, a kiss, a candle for going up to bed. Goodnight, sleep tight, don't let the skeeters bite. The skeeters tried, but if you pulled the blankets up over your head when you heard one coming and only stuck your nose out to breathe, you were safe.

## POSTSCRIPT

Can summers really have been as happy as recollection seems to say? Was the idyll marred only by the odd accident or bad appendix? How account for the need for solitude and quiet that speaks in these notes from the past? Why did that young boy try to shut out the world by reading or to flee it by running? Of course, the wild runner always came home. But why did he cherish gray days and why did he need to feel safe?

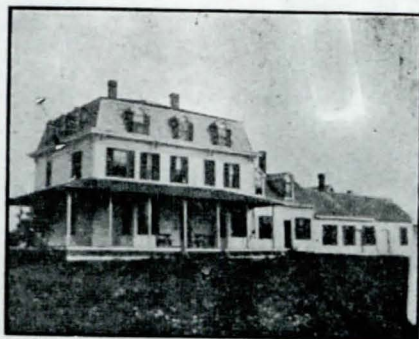
I hardly remember being bored, but, families being families, the good times were certainly punctuated by the common unkindnesses or tyrannies between children, the larger over the littler in turn. To hold things together and keep them going well, Mother certainly needed her rest-time apart, for she bore a heavy load. Father was often not there, either away in Chicago or out in the cabin writing books. When present, he was always a splendid organizer of activities from sailing picnics to a remarkable variety of indoor and outdoor games. But competition, while good for the body, was not always so for sibling spirits. The older child (despite well-plotted handicaps) almost invariably won. The loser then yearned for the "caucus-race" in *Alice*, which goes round in an endless circle so that, when it stops, everyone wins and all get prizes.

But, after all, such things are common enough, and we are whatever we may make of them. Why, then, should one quarrel with the almost-perfect privilege – the sheer luck of the draw – of such summers as those in such a place as that? And it has been my fortune, too, though childless, to see with turning time the next generation leading their children to find or create for themselves the blessings of summertime at Pretty Marsh.

Michael McGiffert is a retired historian living in Williamsburg, Virginia. He and his sister, Ellen McGiffert Brokaw, have spent part or all of almost every summer of their lives at Pretty Marsh. Their older brother, David Eliot McGiffert, also enjoyed Pretty Marsh summers until his death in 2005.

Photographs courtesy of the McGiffert family, with special thanks to Ellen McGiffert Brokaw for her assistance.





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*A Pretty Marsh landmark that became the Haunted House –  
postcard courtesy of Gail Hysom Reiber*