

## THE NAMING OF BELLE ISLE

(Source: "History of Detroit for Young People", by

Harriet A. Marsh and Florence A. Marsh,  
Privately Printed 1938)

Contributed by Joan Kapeller, Gwin, Michigan  
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Those of you who attended the first Campeau Reunion at Belle Isle, Michigan, this year may be interested in knowing a little of the Isle's history.

Belle Isle was first purchased from the Indians by one Lt. George McDougall for various considerations, and a copy of that contract can still be seen as part of the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library (see last paragraph).

On his demise, McDougall's sons sold the island to William Macomb, who, at that time, also owned Grosse Ile. William Macomb died in 1796 and left his land to his three sons, who, not being astute businessmen, let the property slip through their fingers. Barnabas Campau, Sr. bought Belle Isle from David B. Macomb for \$5,000 in paper currency.

In 1879, the heirs of Barnabas Campau sold the Isle to the city for \$200,000! Quite a return on a \$5,000 investment. (An interesting side note: The widow of Barnabas Campau, Jr. married Richard Storrs Willis, the noted composer, who wrote the Christmas Carol, "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear".)

Belle Island was first known by the Indian name "Mah-na-be-zee" (translation "White Swan"). Later, when the French-Canadian settlers arrived, the island was known as

"Ile au Cochon" (translation "Hog Island"). The island was so heavily infested with rattlesnakes, the settlers put a number of hogs on the place to kill the snakes, thus the name.

Many thought the name "Hog Island" was a terrible name for so beautiful a spot, and in 1845 it was renamed Belle Isle after Miss Isabella Cass, the daughter of General Cass, who married the Baron von Lumburg of Germany. The renaming of Belle Isle was done without consulting the owners, but the title stuck. In 1881, the Common Council confirmed the name Belle Isle.

Levi Bishop, a noted lawyer, wrote a poem about Teuscha Grondle, the Indian village which was on the site of Detroit, and the following portion of verse is taken from Canto IV, Stanza 13 of that work:

"\_And in the central stream, apart,  
That masterpiece of nature's art,  
Where beauty sets her seal  
The Mah-na-be-zee, Swan, its name,  
The Ile au Cochon; all the same,  
The same, the fair Belle Isle."

For those of you living near Detroit, Michigan the Burton Historical Collection located in the Detroit Public Library has the original Campeau deed to Belle Isle. Mary Berndt, a direct descendant of Barnabas Campau, sold the deed to the Burton Historical Collection in the 1950's.

## FAMILY RECORD FORM

The following page can be photocopied and used as a blank form for assembling family genealogical information: