FOX ISLE

"The France of America," is what a well-known artist has called the beautiful islands which lie just north, yet close to the heart, of the village of Waterford. It is in the development of these islands and of Fox river and the wooded hills and valleys bordering on it that Waterford's most successful future will be found.

"It is the prettiest place I've seen in America," is another assertion made by the artist. "It's got it all over the places inhabited by art centers. There's everything of beauty here."

The artist quoted is Professor Geo. Oberteffeuer, who, at the time he was director of the Art department of the Milwaukee Normal school, spent a summer on Fox Isle, then called Plucker's Island. "I don't believe I've moved my easel more than twenty feet from the house, and yet I've painted a number of subjects and could keep on painting for a year and still paint something different each time," he told an admirer of his work.

"The Little Bathing Beach," the most famous of Prof. Oberteffeuer's pictures, painted that summer was awarded the Sessman Gold Medal by the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts where it was displayed the winter of 1921-22 immediately after it was painted.

The picture shows the river bank with the unpainted bath house standing against a background of hills, willows and elms, with the varicolored waters of the Fox in the foreground and a happy group of the neighborhood boys and girls playing in the water or idling on the bank.

Fox Isle and Fox Isle park have only recently been made known to the public outside of Waterford and its immediate vicinity. Of their history before the first white settlers came to this community nothing is known. One feels sure that the nature and beauty loving Indians who roamed at will over southern Wisconsin knew and loved the beautiful spot, but it remains for the artist-poet to weave into story form the traditions and legends which were the Red Man's and about which he and his companions talked as they gathered around the camp fire at their day of hunting and fishing.

Waterford's two first white settlers, Samuel Chapman and Levi Barnes, were attracted to the present site of the village by the splendid promise of water power offered at this place. The first dam across the Fox river was built in the fall of 1837. Soon after Chapman and Barnes built the first grist mill. The first plat of the village of Waterford, now in the possession of Miss Lura Stone, grand daughter of Samuel Chapman, shows five mill sites extending along the banks of the river. At a somewhat later date the "Run-A-By" dam was built and a mill at one time owned and operated by S. C. Russ, son-in-law of Levi Barnes, was built just east of the new dam. The islands, which lie between the two dams originally contained about forty acres of land. The erection of the two dams, while adding to the charm and picturesqueness of the islands, greatly reduced them in acreage. The Russ mill later became the property of Mr. Brockhurst. It was destroyed by fire while in his possession and never rebuilt. The other on the west side and in sight of the islands, now belongs to the Waterford Milling Co.

Andrew Jones, who came from New York in the late thirties, also owned and operated a mill on the Fox river and for a number of years the first island north of the village, now called Fox Isle, was known as Jones' Island.

The islands have been held by a number of different persons since Wisconsin lands were thrown open to white settlers. Records show that the first legal title was in the hands of Elephalet Cramer, of Milwaukee, his claim having been entered in the United States land office on March 9, 1839. Within a month title to the two islands was transferred to Levi Barnes and Samuel Chapman.

Others who have owned them at different times and for different periods of time, using them for different purposes, have been, Samuel C. Russ, who built the "Run-A-By" dam and the east side flouring mill; J. L. Edwards, a son-in-law of S. C. Russ; Charles Moe; William Kortendick, Sr., father of George Kortendick of the firm of Edwards & Kortendick; the William Kortendick heirs; Joseph Dreisman, Henry Plucker and A. F. and R. A. Heintz.

In the long ago these islands were frequently used for neighborhood picnics. Mrs. J. W. Jordan tells of attending several Fourth of July celebrations there. Time has not changed them and it was an ideal place for such a gathering then as now. At one time they were used as a pasture for sheep and hogs. Island No. 2 was from that time called Buck Island. It is still known as Buck Island, although within the year the name has been changed to Fox Isle park. When
Mr. Moe purchased the property it was with the idea of developing one of the springs on the island which contained iron, said to be of medicinal value. The plan, however, was abandoned, and after owning them about a year he sold them to William Kortendiek, Sr., and they were again used as a pasture.

It was Daniel Thompson, one of Waterford’s early settlers, owner and operator of a saw mill and extensive lumber yards on the west side of the river, who erected a large summer hotel on what is now Fox Isle. Lumber and labor were cheap and the speculating was not such an expensive amusement as it would be today, Joseph Dreisman, the next owner, used the “hotel” for his home and the land for gardening and general farming.

March 1, 1915, Henry Plucker purchased the islands of Mr. Dreisman, remodeled and improved the old building found there, making it into a comfortable and attractive home which is really another resort. Mr. Plucker cleaned up the grounds, laid out flower beds and walks and the islands, then called Plucker’s islands, have been known far and near as a place of rare beauty. An old barn on the first island was torn down and used in the construction of two cottages erected on Buck Island. The first built was used for some time by the Arrow club, of Milwaukee. The other cottage has been rented to different parties from Milwaukee, Chicago and Racine who came seeking rest and quiet in this pretty corner of the state. The cottage was lent to different parties from Milwaukee, Chicago and Racine who came seeking rest and quiet in this pretty corner of the state. The cottage was lent to different parties from Milwaukee, Chicago and Racine who came seeking rest and quiet in this pretty corner of the state. The cottage was lent to different parties from Milwaukee, Chicago and Racine who came seeking rest and quiet in this pretty corner of the state. The cottage was lent to different parties from Milwaukee, Chicago and Racine who came seeking rest and quiet in this pretty corner of the state. The cottage was lent to different parties from Milwaukee, Chicago and Racine who came seeking rest and quiet in this pretty corner of the state. The cottage was lent to different parties from Milwaukee, Chicago and Racine who came seeking rest and quiet in this pretty corner of the state. The cottage was lent to different parties from Milwaukee, Chicago and Racine who came seeking rest and quiet in this pretty corner of the state.

Henry Huening, a former Waterford boy, who has made good in Chicago, but who has kept an interest in the business of his boyhood, was one of the first to buy a corner of this island which he has appropriately named “Mountain View.” It is Mr. Huening’s pleasure to build a beautiful summer home on his lots where he and his family will spend all or a part of every summer away from a great city. During the past summer he has constructed a splendid and wonderfully attractive sea wall with stairs which will lead to the new residence. The view from this point is one of the finest to be seen anywhere on the islands.

Other lots have been bought by B. J. Huening and George Huening, also of Chicago, Mr. Thiesen and the Starks, all of whom are planning to improve their lots and build summer homes on them.

In the fall of 1923 a handsome new steel bridge was constructed between Fox Isle and Fox Isle park so one can drive from one island to the other. A steel bridge erected in the fall of 1923 joins the two islands with this island, the mainland. A pretty rustic footbridge also leads to the island from Second Street.

Work has already begun on the construction of an ice house from which the cottagers as well as the Huening residence and the people of the village may, be, supplied with ice during the warm months of the year. Plans are also made for the erection before the summer of 1924 of a number of cottages. A good base ball field is to be laid out on Fox Isle. With the co-operation of the business men of Waterford and the base ball fans of the community there will be as good an island team as can be found in any of the summer resorts in this country.

During the past summer automobilists from nearly every state in the union have visited Fox Isle. This shows something of the possibilities there are for tourist and resort trade. Ice cream, soft drinks, candy and lunches may be found there. The future season will see great growth in numbers and interest. The growth of this resort means a real boom for the village of Waterford. To boost the Fox Isle resort means to boost the home town.