

Island Women Prepared

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Staff Reporter

The daily routine of a woman living on Amherst Island presents no problem 99 per cent of the time. It's that remaining one per cent that can cause the trouble.

The last two weeks have presented a problem for the residents of this Lake Ontario island, three miles south of Millhaven.

The inhabitants had been without transportation to the mainland until Syl Apps, MLA for Kingston and the Islands and A.T. McNab, deputy minister of highways partially solved the problem by providing temporary transportation on the tug Salvage Prince.

Automobiles are driven to the point of departure and left until the return trip. This is not a completely satisfactory arrangement for some but it is a way of receiving mail, supplies and transportation for people employed on the mainland.

During an interview Friday with five women living in the village of Stella — Mrs. Earle Willard, Mrs. Ross Filson, Mrs. George Bierma, Mrs. Estel Strain and Mrs. Ernest Fleming — I learned of some of the problems and inconveniences

caused by the lack of transportation to the mainland.

There were several days between the time the island ferry, the Amherst Islander, broke down and the introduction of the tug service as a temporary measure.

"It is something you make up your mind to," said Mrs. Bierma. "When I moved here four years ago I was constantly afraid of just such problems arising.

"It took me a while to adjust to the inconveniences," she said. "Neighbors are wonderful. In time of need they gather around and help.

"I wanted to see the Sound of Music Wednesday night in Kingston. We took a horse and sleigh and crossed the ice. Where there's a will there's a way."

Mrs. Bierma and her husband operate the local cheese factory on the Island.

"Fear of someone going through the ice is always at the back of one's mind," said Mrs. Strain, insurance agent and tax adjuster.

When asked what an expectant mother would do if a complicated delivery was encountered, she mentioned an example involving her daughter and ex-

plained that early arrangements are made for accommodations on the mainland weeks before the scheduled arrival to insure medical attention is available.

This is an absolute necessity, as there isn't a doctor on the island. Most of the women rely on Mrs. Clifford Glenn in time of emergencies, she said. Mrs. Glenn is a registered nurse and according to the women is always available.

Mrs. Ernest Fleming, mother of Reeve Harry Fleming, recalled former winters on the Island when people just stayed at home, during this time of year. Most of the families lived on farms then, she said and there was always plenty to eat.

Women prepared food ahead of time just as they do today with the only difference being that the freezer is now used for storage.

Mrs. Fleming's farm has been the homestead for the Fleming family since 1830 and during her years on the Island could not recall a single death resulting from lack of emergency medical attention. She did, however, recall two lives being lost several years ago when people fell through thin ice.

Mrs. Filson and her husband have operated the island confectionery store and coffee shop for the past ten years. She said they saw the need of accommodations near the ferry and this prompted them to give up farming.

Her son is now operating the family farm. Her concern is not with present accommodations but more with future transportation for high school students who in September will be required to attend Napanee High School. She agreed with Mrs. Bierma that greater opportunities are available at the Napanee school, but when an inconvenience such as the present one arises, she feels some arrangements have to be made to make sure students can return home each day.

Social life for the women includes Women's Institute meetings, church organizations, Legion dances, card games and house parties. Mrs. Bessie Tugwell, an 82-year-old widow (and piano player) is always available for any social event. The local WI is assisting council in providing a park on the island, part of a centennial project.

During the interviews the women were asked if they felt the island was on the upswing.

They all agreed it was. A frame home built ten years ago has more than doubled in value. They also said more people are coming to the island than leaving it every year. The present population is approximately 400, made up of active farmers and summer dwellers.

There are three grocery stores on the island which have supplies of fresh fruits and vegetables most of the time. A hairdresser is centrally located in the village and also a dressmaker. The women rely on one another in time of need and for social hours — a fine example of living together in harmony.

They had suggestions to make regarding a solution to all their inconveniences and fears. A bridge linking the island to the mainland would be an ideal solution. However, an additional third crew operating the ferry would help solve their problems, they believe.