

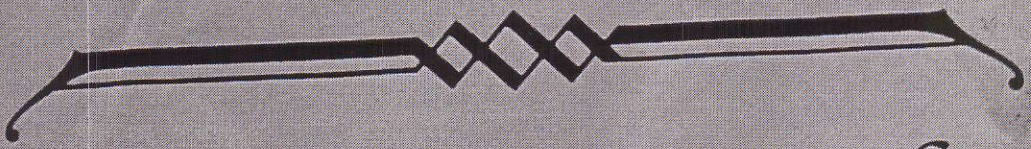


SANTA * MARIA

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The Flagship of Lake Monomonac

by PRISCILLA BEAL ILINITCH



■IT'S A BOAT, IT'S A LODGE, IT'S THE Santa Maria!

Actually, this Rindge, New Hampshire summer home defies description. Named for the flagship of that most famous voyage of all, in 1942, this *Santa Maria* (left) is a unique combination of pirate ship and forest lodge, sturdily constructed of stone and cement in an act of unbridled imagination.

Located on a wooded peninsula at the head of Lake Monomonac, it was built more than a quarter century ago as the resting place of a fabulous collection of art treasures gathered the world over.

Today it is the vacation retreat of the Loring R. Stevensons, a delighted family from Winchendon, Massachusetts, who are planning to convert it to their year-round home.

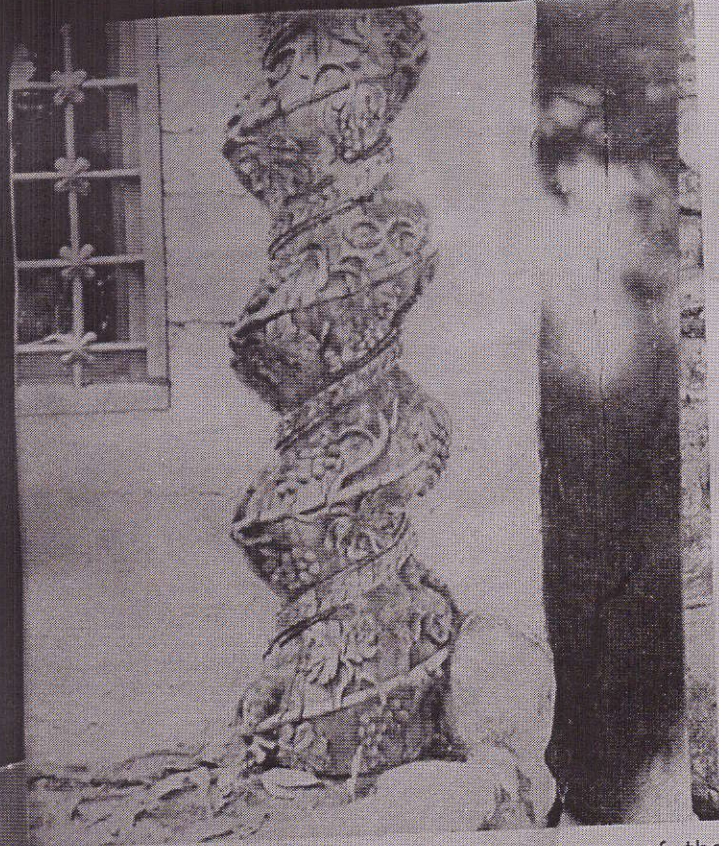
The *Santa Maria* is the inspiration of a genial Catholic clergyman, also from Winchendon, the Very Rev. Canon Wilfred A. Tisdell. Familiarly known as "Father Tisdell" by local parishioners and non-Catholics alike,

the retired pastor is an art connoisseur of rare and recognized discernment. Through a number of years, Father Tisdell traveled the Seven Seas collecting art works of museum quality. Many of these he gave to the church. Eventually, he envisioned a vacation retreat where he could both store and enjoy those pieces from his collection which he had kept.

The property was conceived obviously in a mood of whimsy, as exemplified by the choice of name for this, the largest of Father Tisdell's three "ships." The smallest was a canoe—the *Pinta*, of course—which was originally the imaginative owner's only access to his wooded one-acre peninsula.

Father Tisdell chose the location as the most beautiful spot on Lake Monomonac. There were no cottages in the area at that time. He is not quite sure himself how he thought of building his summer retreat in the design of a boat. "I think I just wanted something different, some-

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A hand-carved antique post, one of the many built into the *Santa Maria*.

THE FLAGSHIP OF LAKE MONOMONAC

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something on the crazy side," he suggests.

Most of the treasures which graced the *Santa Maria* when "captained" by Father Tisdell now rest in a Catholic college museum in Montreal. The college was originally a seminary, and Father Tisdell taught there for a number of years. The school established its museum with the gifts from its former teacher.

Through many years, Father Tisdell has combined a love of travel with the appreciation of beautiful things. The first antique he ever bought was a Chinese rose jar for his mother, and it went on from there.

"I like almost everything old," Father Tisdell says.

Father Tisdell, at 76, still travels and still finds objects of beauty wherever he goes. He has visited most of the countries of the world but enjoys especially his visits with clerical friends in Canada.

Approachable now by land, the property once owned by Father Tisdell retains its natural setting of original pine, hemlock,

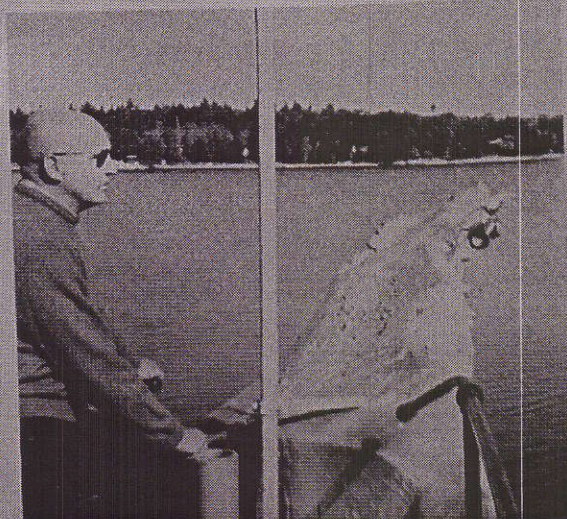
and broadleaf forest. Here the *Santa Maria's* waterfront prow merges into a spacious lodge of stone construction. Dozens of lovely religious plaques and other oddments are tucked in the rockwork, delighting the eye with bits of beauty. A formal patio lends its charm with the flavor of an Italian terrace overlooking the blue Mediterranean, and the whole property slopes to a 665' waterfront with private, sandy beach.

The *Santa Maria's* entrance, a strap-iron hinged oak port with a 15th Century Triton executed for a Venetian palazzo, sets the stage for delights within.

Although the bulk of the art works once found in the *Santa Maria's* hold were removed when the property changed hands, an opulent and exotic Old World flavor remains. It is seen in the marble and tile spotted floor of the 50' x 20' livingroom, the walnut paneling and wrought iron flambeaux, the carved pilasters and leaded pane windows. A study converted to sleeping quarters opens from a Moorish portal with heavy fabric door, straight out of the Arabian Nights. The atmosphere of other sleeping rooms is that of an old ship, and a marine fresco graces the galley.

Part of the *Santa Maria's* charm lies in the fun of reaching special nooks through secret doors and ladder-equipped hatches. A secret trap door at the end of the living room, for example, gives access to the bistro, a veritable pirates' lair with white cobblestone walls festooned with bottles. Then too, reached by a hatchway, the pilot house with its picture windows on three sides is a wonderful re-

Santa Maria's owner, Loring Stevenson, surveys Lake Monomonac from the "bow."





Meticulous detail can be seen in this section of a hand-carved oaken door.

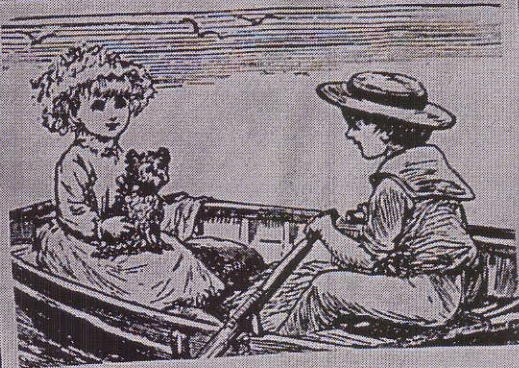
treat. The surrounding deck is a popular sunning spot, affording a marvelous view of the entire lake.

The bowed livingroom window at the "prow" was once fitted out with an altar. Here Mass was served to summer residents whose approaching craft on a Sunday morning looked like a "converging fleet," according to those who remember.

One who vividly recalls the *Santa Maria* in days past is the present owner. As a young vacationer with his parents at the lake, Stevenson had always been intrigued with the property; but he never expected to own it. Now, the problem is that other vacationers still view the *Santa Maria* with considerable interest, and sometimes with puzzlement. The result leaves the Stevensons somewhat disconcerted and often startled as perfect strangers peer in the "portholes" at all hours.

Frequent uninvited guests have mistaken the *Santa Maria* for anything from a gift shop to a dine and dance establishment—and are sometimes hard to convince that it's a private residence.

The Stevensons complain that it's a nuisance, yet at the same time concede it's probably a small price to pay for living in the storybook setting of the *Santa Maria*. ◆◆



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