

The Bonner Family

Information provided by Leone Bonner Peel



F.R. and S. Ann Bonner

In 1918, at the urging of his brother-in-law, who was living on the Rainy Lake Ranch, F. R. Bonner left an office job in Grand Rapids, Michigan to try his hand at farming a sandy 80 acres adjoining the Martin Trafelet farm.

Mr. Bonner and a teen-aged brother spent eleven days on the road, driving a wagon pulled by Prince, a horse that had been on a milk route in the city. Mrs. Bonner and two and one-half year -old son, Bob, came later by train. When her husband in overalls met her with his face shaved only in patches around huge sunburned blisters she was tempted to take the next train back to the city.

They lived that summer in a tent, carrying water from a distant spring, while cleaning up an existing shanty that had been unoccupied for some time except by some livestock that wandered in and out, leaving grease deposits to be scraped off the walls.

It was not an easy life. Mrs. Bonner told about making butter by shaking a Mason jar and dropping the precious bit of butter, which sank out of sight in the sand. Also, the teen-ager who was "helping"

them would take a cup to the spring to get a drink instead of bringing back a pail of water.

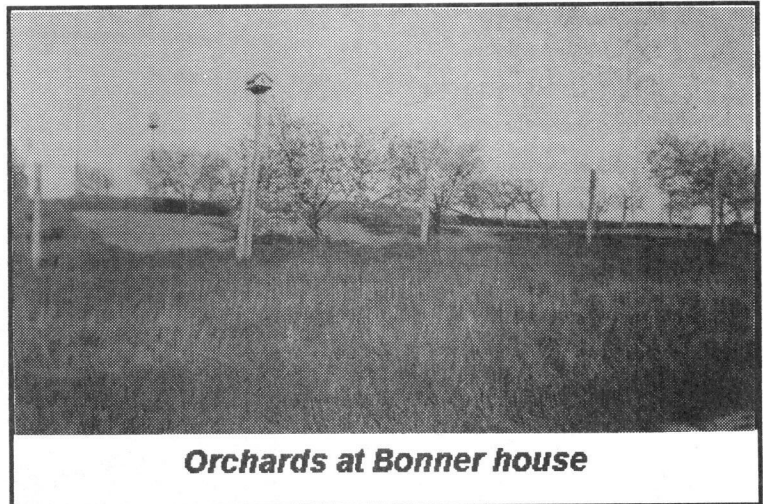
Mr. Bonner was nicknamed "Boone" because of his love of hunting and fishing. Deer were rarely seen in those days but foxes and bobcats were plentiful and the teen-aged brother shot a bear that crossed the farm. The Grandma Bonner in Grand Rapids often ended her letters with, "Don't let the bears get Robert."

When daughter, Leone, was born and Mr. Bonner went into town to get "old Doc Smith." The good doctor asked, "Aren't there any women in the neighborhood? Do you want me to come out?" Whereupon, Mr. Bonner replied, "Do you think I came in here just to tell you about it?"

Travel to town was over a one-lane corduroy road through the Long Swamp with turnouts for passing. The person reaching a turnout first would pull into let an approaching team pass. There were rattlesnakes in the swamp and Mr. Bonner and Bob killed four one day while fishing a small trout stream that branched from the roadside ditch. They had heard a buzzing sound and found the snakes under a small pine tree.

In the spring of 1923 Mr. Bonner was hired as Millersburg's D&M station agent and bought one of two houses in the south end of town that had escaped an earlier forest fire.

The house still stands behind the Methodist Church and is owned by Olin Gould. Mr. Bonner planted many fruit trees, had a large garden, a few beehives and lots of birdhouses. Two martin houses that he made had 24 to 26 rooms each. For a short time they had a cow staked out to pasture but later bought milk from Archie Schuler.



Orchards at Bonner house

Mrs. Bonner canned the garden produce, filled the yard with flowerbeds, sewed for the family and made clothes for others for 15 cents an hour on an old treadle sewing machine.

She was County Chairman of the Home Economics group, leader of the Epworth League, composed of Babe Robbins, Alice Peetz, Ila Crooks, Donald Plume, Retha Freeman and others. Some of the children from her large Primary Sunday School class were Art Freel, Perry Atkins, Laurabelle McDonald, Marie Russell, Catherine Robbins, Jim Nokes and many of their siblings.

The Bonners had a cabinet King radio which attracted men to listen to the prizefights. Among the men were George Welch and John Krauth. Mr. Krauth required a spittoon, which Mrs. Bonner made of rolled-up newspapers. The house was also the center for parties for the young people- peanut parties, cootie parties, and taffy pulls.

Both Bob and Leone attended the Millersburg School and graduated from Onaway High School. Bob spent five years in the army during World War II, married in California and raised five daughters and a son.

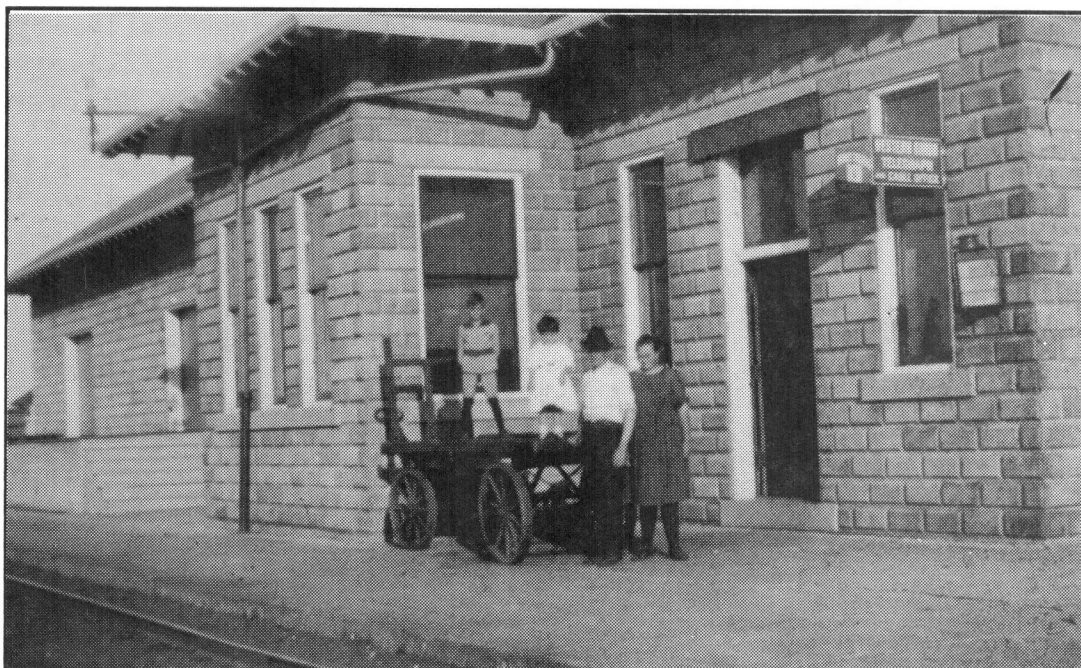
When Mr. Bonner became relief station agent for the D& M railroad he trained Orrie Freeman to supply the Millersburg depot and the Bonners moved to East Tawas in 1940 and later to Alpena where he died at age 55.

Mrs. Bonner lived in Centerline with her daughter, re-married and moved on a farm in Ohio. Ten years later, upon the death of her husband, she moved to Auburn Hills with her son-in-law Walter 'Junior' Peel, Leone, and their two sons and daughter.

After the death of Junior, both Mrs. Bonner and Leone moved back to Millersburg. Son Bob returned from California so Mrs. Bonner was with her children until she died at age 96 and was buried beside Mr. Bonner in Riverside Cemetery.



S. Ann Bonner - 1937



Robert, Leone, and Flavie Bonner, and Marie Storms in front of depot