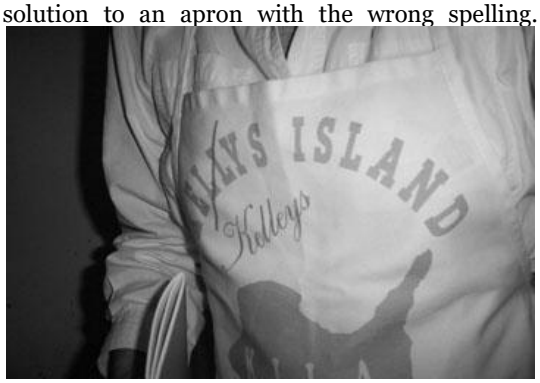
KELLEY, KELLEY'S, KELLEYS' or KELLY ISLAND by Leslie Korenko

The spelling of the island's name has caused problems for islanders for many years. But it started in April 1864, when the gauntlet was thrown down by Cleveland newspapers on how to 'correctly' spell the name of Kelley's Island. There is no argument that the island was named after the Kelley family, but why is it so difficult for everyone to spell? Our current problem is the constant dropping of the second 'e' from the Village's name. Many T-shirts and souvenirs have to be returned when the name is misspelled.

Misspelled souvenirs still abound. The Kelleys Island Landowners Assoc. came up with a creative solution to an apron with the wrong spelling.



On April 27 *1864, the first volley occurred.* "Kelley's Island or Kelley Island? - That's the question. The Cleveland Herald, in copying a couple of items from the Register, says: Will our usually correct friends of the Register allow us to criticize their use of one word? They should say Kelley Island, not Kelley's Island."

The Register responded, "Certainly. But your criticism is mere assertion. You say 'they should say' so and not so, but adduce no argument or authority in support of your assertion. Now for the facts: The island in question was formerly, and within the memory of many of our citizens, the property of a man named Cunningham, and was then known as Cunningham's Island. Afterwards the island was purchased by the Messrs. Kelley, when the name was changed by a special act of the Legislature to 'Kelley's Island,' and annexed to Erie County, since which time it has ever been known as 'Kelley's Island.' Will our friends of the Herald 'fall-in' and use the name of one of the most celebrated islands of Lake Erie correctly, or stick to their text?"

The Herald was not to be corrected and a few days later it was "Kelley's Island, or Kelley Island, again – We supposed a 'mere assertion' would instantly suggest to our well educated neighbor the impropriety of which we complain. Kelley's Island signifies the ownership of the island; that it belongs to a man named Kelley. The intention in such cases is to perpetuate a name, not the ownership. As the Register uses the name, it would appear that the island belongs to a Mr. Kelley. That is not true now, nor according to the Register's showing, was it ever true. The island was owned by two persons of the name Kelley, and assuming the name as the Register proposes to use it to be correct, the apostrophe is in the wrong place; it should be Kelleys' Island, not Kelley's Island. Any way you can fix it, the name is not right; it should be Kelley Island, taking its name from its former owners – Cleveland Herald."

The Editor of the Register was quick to correct the Herald reporter. "The Herald seems determined to stick to what it says should be the name of the beautiful island of Lake Erie, which forms a township of Erie county. If the editor of the Herald will take the trouble to turn to the local laws of Ohio, passed by the Legislature of 1842-3, page 300, he will there find an enactment of which the following is a copy:

'AN ACT, to attach Kelley's Island to the county of Erie.

SECTION 1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Ohio, That the Island in Lake Erie, formerly known as Cunningham's Island, now called Kelley's Island, and formerly part of the county of Ottawa, shall thereafter be attached to, and form part of, the county of Erie.'

Grammatically, the Herald is right and we have no doubt the name of the Island would have been written in the plural possessive, if it had been generally known at that early day, that the Island was owned jointly by I. & D. [Irad & Datus] Kelley, instead of Mr. I. Kelley, alone. But the facts are, Mr. I. Kelley was never a resident of the Island and, as only Mr. D. Kelley was known as its proprietor, it was so written, and as we have both custom and law for it, it would not be good policy to change its name, unless by an enactment of the legislature.

In legal papers 'Kelley Island' would not stand before our courts, and it would be the height of nonsense for the people to write it in common-place business one way, and those who administer the law, another. There are some very intelligent men residing on the Island in question and all of whom agree with us as to its name. In the fourth number of the 'Fire Lands

Pioneer,' a magazine of very general circulation in this part of the State, will be found a long and well written account of the early history of the Island, by George C. Huntington, Esq., an old resident of the Island. If the editor of the Herald will take the pains to read this sketch, he will there discover the name of the Island in question, to be '*Kelley's Island*,' and many reasons are assigned for the continuance of it. We hope the Herald will rest satisfied." *That article appeared in the June 1863 issue of The Fire Lands Pioneer and that history appears in various sections of the series about Kelleys Island history, by Leslie Korenko.*

Even the State wrestles with the spelling of the Island's name as anyone looking for directions to the island can attest.

The Herald however, refused defeat and the battle continued. This was a lot of column space! "The Cleveland Herald takes a sharp turn and rather tries to crawl out of its original criticism, and 'falls in' on the grammatical use of the apostrophe, thus yielding to the principle that it is quite as unsafe to change the name of a township for the sake of euphony, as that of an individual. We give place to a communication on the subject this morning, from an intelligent Islander [George C. Huntington], who fully endorses our position."

George C. Huntington offered this. "If this subject is not already exhausted, and if your fastidious neighbor of the Herald is not yet satisfied, a few words in addition to what you have already said will, I think, give the matter its quietus. The act referred to in your issue of yesterday, merely recognized the existence of the Township of Kelley's Island, without reference to its origin. If we go a little further back, we find the original act establishing the township, which reads as follows:

'Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Ohio, That all that tract or territory of land, known as Cunningham's Island, situated on the south side of Lake Erie, and within the county of Erie, be, and the same is hereby constituted a Township, to be known and distinguished as the Township of Kelley's Island.' This act bears date January 1, 1840, and the copy in my possession in manuscript is duly certified as correct by Carter B. Harlan, Secretary of State, March 6, 1840.

That the name as it stands, was no mistake in the framer of the bill or in the Legislature, seems perfectly evident from the fact that by the second section of the same act the islands known as the Bass Islands (Put-in-Bay and that group) were in the same manner constituted a township, to be known and distinguished as the Township of Van Rensselaer. Here was recognized the principle for which the Herald seems to be contending – each township bears the name of the then most prominent inhabitant. Mr. Van Rensselaer was then lessee of the Bass Islands, where he reigned all but supreme.

The Legislature could surely have said simply, 'Township of Kelley,' had such been their meaning. Again. In the official list of Post Offices in the United States we find 'Kelley's Island,' thus following State authority. I could cite many more cases to prove the correctness of your position, but it is unnecessary. H."

In 1865, the Island Post Office used the apostrophe in its cancellation stamp.

The controversy did not end here, but resurfaced occasionally in what appeared to be a single-minded effort by the Herald to correct such an obvious error. Additional volleys continued to appear for the next 10 years or so.

Huntington explained why there was an apostrophe in Kelley's Island, but what happened to it? When the Village incorporated in 1887 the papers showed the name as 'Village of Kelley's Island,' with the apostrophe. Some people believe that when the Kelley's sold off most of their holdings, it was no longer their Island, and that was when the name changed. But that is not the case. The

State of Ohio, which records all corporation papers, has only one record of the incorporation of Kelley's Island and it has the apostrophe. No official changes were ever made to its name. This is an instance where popular use has replaced the official spelling. By the 1900's, newspapers were routinely dropping the apostrophe, spelling it Kelleys Island.

This brings us to the Post Office. Even though the Village never changed the spelling, the U. S. Post Office on the Island DID change it. On August 18, 1893, under postmaster Edward Ward, the name of the Kelley's Island Post Office was officially changed to the Kelleys Island Post Office. No apostrophe, no fanfare. This was an effort by the Post Office to streamline its addressing system. Other locations underwent a similar change like Martha's Vineyard.

This envelope from 1901 shows the Kelleys Island postmark without the apostrophe.

From the book Kelleys Island 1862-1865, the Civil War, the Island Soldiers, & the Island Queen, by Leslie Korenko.