

Sims Michigan Ranch Grows with Family

BY ELEANOR PAGE

About 50 years ago a flat boat loaded with lumber and a crew of carpenters was pulled north from Bay City in Lake Huron's thumb shaped Saginaw bay to a point near the bay entrance and the village of Au Gres, Mich. There, alongside a sandy stretch of beach, the workmen started putting up a house which measured 24 by 28 feet.

As soon as the walls were up and the roof on, its owners, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin W. Sims, put up mosquito netting at the windows, installed a two burner stove, and moved in with their two little girls. And that was the start of the main house at Sims ranch.

As the Sims family increased, younger members slept at first in tents, then in additions to the original small house, then in cabins which had been erected for other purposes elsewhere on the property and moved down to the bay shore to join the slowly elongating row of dwellings. The fishhouse now is the summer home of the Frank Sims family; an old cross-roads schoolhouse was brought 2 miles to be incorporated in the Edwin Sims Jr. residence. The boathouse still is used for boats, but there is a far away look in a family member's eye when she considers, dreamily, that "it would make a stunning home with a double story living room."

Mr. Sims no longer is present to run the domain he staked out as a young man when he was growing up in Bay City where his father, Walter Sims, was a minister, school principal, newspaper publisher, and yacht builder. He is remembered with esteem and affection by his grandchildren as a white haired giant who took them sailing in his 80 foot craft just as he had their father during the days that Edwin Sims picked out the 5,000 acres which were to become an unique family property.

Edwin Sims' widow now presides over the ranch in capacity of mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, surrounded by memories of a full and active life, and looking forward to even more diversified activities, such as another trip to Europe next spring, and a resumption of the famed ranch hunts this fall. She has moved out of the sprawling ranchhouse, however, and into a newly created suite of rooms in the long, narrow cabin next in line to the east. She has taken her favorite pieces from her Chicago home for her sitting room and bedroom, and shares the cabin with Miss Mary Brand, known affectionately to all generations as Brandy, who presides over the office.

These quarters are convenient for Mrs. Sims "to get away from it all," she says, for she finds the ranchhouse more like a popular country club, especially on weekends when any overflow of guests is quartered there.

She is fond of remembering that it was a slip of a coin which brought the late Mr. Sims to Chicago instead of to New York City after he was graduated from the University of Michigan law school. It was no matter of chance, however, that the ranch property includes more than 2 miles of water front. Mrs. Sims refused to spend summers on her husband's Au Gres property if she couldn't be on the water. So he bought the bay side strip which has become more important to the family as years passed than the cattle and farming aspects of the ranch's early days.

The herds of cattle and sheep no longer are kept up, and the number of horses in the stables has been reduced to a few which grandchildren and guests keep exercised. Mrs. Sims just now and with great reluctance has stopped riding but her horse goes out daily with younger riders.

To the east of the cabin Mrs. Sims now uses is Stagger Inn, a one room house created from an old cabin and used by Mac and David Sims, sons of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Sims. Mrs. Frank Sims has decorated it suitably to be used also as an extra guestroom, complete with little front porch, tiled bath, and screened back porch. Her own house, the one made over from the fishhouse, is a hub of activity as the cement tennis court, laid down 25 years ago and still in perfect condition, is immediately behind in an area cleared out of the woods.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. Sims Jr. would be at ease in any fashionable spa, yet fits perfectly into ranch life. Instead of breaking up the schoolhouse into two or three rooms, the owners kept it intact as a large living room, added a sitting porch on the bay side, a dining porch on the more sheltered opposite side; a kitchen, and four bedrooms and two baths, which stretch out single file along a hall leading west.

The house, with its magnificently proportioned living room, is a delight to the feminine eye, yet rugged enough to withstand water, sand, and casual life. The French blue of the living room wallpaper echoes the color from the bay; the fireplace is raised, for convenience in charcoal broiling, and banded in quaint, colorful tiles; window seats along the bay side wall are covered with red and white striped ticking which matches some of the covers of the black wicker furniture used on the porch. The organ which once was used in Grandfather Sims' church is in the living room.

A delicate blue vine print papers the long hall; young Pamela's room is done in a bright gold paper with scattered bouquets, and the same paper is used to cover a table which is attached to one wall. Young Susie's rooms has spool beds, painted white.

Last year they added two more bedrooms and another bath. The two new bedrooms are paneled in pine. One has quilted bed covers of sturdy green chintz with bolsters covered in green and yellow plaid. More of the plaid makes a dust ruffle under the pine valance which outlines the corner windows. The other room has draw draperies of a scenic print showing a white manor house, a huge red barn, and some horses, and typical of Mrs. Sims' original touches is the picture which hangs between the beds. It is simply a square yard of the same print material put into a pine frame!

This house, and the one next to it belonging to Mr. and Mrs. John F. Evans (Priscilla Sims), as the newest houses, naturally are the most chic.

The Evanses' home is completely modern, with a knotty pine kitchen with views south, west and north, lighting and cabinets placed where they do the most good, and every other convenience the housewife could dream of. Electricity came to the camp only 10 years ago, and the summer residents have made good use of it altho the ranch still cuts its own ice and stores it every winter.

The interior of the Evanses' living room is knotty pine, too, and so are some of the handsome end tables and other furnishings in this gay room. The house shows the individuality that owner-designed ones usually display.

Eastward along the shore are

the homes of three other Sims daughters, Mrs. Peter C. Krupp, and Mrs. Alexander C. McLaughlin of Chicago, and Mrs. Richard Coffin of Roslyn, N. Y. The boat-house marks the end of the line of buildings. It is empty this summer as the Sea Hawk, a cruiser, has been put in the water for the first time since the war, and most of the smaller boats are out and tied up in front of various cabins.
