

PAST TIMES

Newsletter of the Harbor Springs Area Historical Society

September, 2003

Little Traverse Lighthouse Tour

Saturday, October 18, 2003 9:00 am until 5:00 pm

History of the Little Traverse Light at Harbor Point

Many events influenced the creation of the Little Traverse Light. Soldiers anxious to acquire land returned home from the Civil War. In 1875 treaties with the Native American tribes were "modified" which streamlined land acquisition by groups of settlers and vacationers. Railroad service started in 1873 to Petoskey. As a result of all these factors, boat traffic in Little Traverse Bay saw great increase. However, in spite of enthusiastic reports and requests to the U.S. Congress as early as 1873, it was not until 1882 that \$15,000 was appropriated to build a light at Little Traverse.

The Harbor Point Association was formed in 1878 when Father Weikamp sold 52 acres on the Point to 22 original shareholders for \$1300. In 1883 the Association sold three and a half acres to the U.S. Government for the lighthouse project. Construction of the light by the U.S. Lighthouse Service in 1884 saw the rise of a one and a half story building with a large tower attached to the south end. The red brick walls were 12 inches thick and sat on stone supports 20 inches thick. A Fourth Order Fresnel lens for the tower was ordered from Paris.

Elizabeth Whitney Williams was the first "wickie" and she was also the first woman light keeper in the United States. She saw the light lit on September 25, 1884. In her book, A Child of the Sea, Williams describes her first view of the light as she approaches by boat from her last post on Beaver Island: "Just a few hours passed when we steamed into Little Traverse Harbor, and the 'red light', just like the one we had left, was flashing its rays over the waters of Little Traverse Bay for the first time. The water was calm and still. The 'red light' shone deep into the quiet waters, and many eyes were watching the bright rays from the light-house tower, and the wish of their hearts had been gratified in having a light house on Harbor Point to guide steamers and vessels into the harbor." (A Child of the Sea, p. 223)

Over the years, until the turn of the century, regular improvements and additions occurred. The lighthouse was hooked up in 1891 to the municipal water supply, developed by local inventor Ephraim Shay. In 1896 a fog bell tower was added with an automatic striking device that sounded two bells every thirty seconds. Of course, automatic in those days meant a cranking of the device by the keeper first! A red brick fuel storage building was added in 1898 to hold the more flammable fuel kerosene, which replaced whale oil and lard.

Several keepers were employed between 1884 and 1962. After writing her book in 1905, light keeper Williams retired in 1913. Alfred Erickson replace her and stayed until 1940. He retired after the responsibility of the lights was transferred to the Coast Guard in 1939. It is supposed that increased government paperwork may have hastened his departure! The Coast Guard also changed the color of the light from red to green. In 1963 the light was automated with the construction of a steel tower displaying a flashing green light.

Williams ended her book with a stirring description of Harbor Point and its light: "Last, but not least, is beautiful Harbor Point. A narrow point of land which helps to form the harbor with water on both sides and a heavy growth of trees of many kinds making lovely, natural, shady parks, with many fine summer homes and beautiful drives. On the end of the Point stands the lighthouse with its red light flashing out at night over the waters, looking like a great red ruby set with diamonds as the electric lights are shining around the bay and harbor." (A Child of the Sea. P.228, 229)

Come join HSAHS with the generous cooperation of the Harbor Point Association in a first-ever public tour of the Little Traverse Light. The tour will be Saturday, October 18, 2003 from 9 am until 5 pm. Transportation by trolley from the parking lot to the end of the Point will be provided to ticket holders only. Reservations may be made by sending your check or money order to: HSAHS, P.O. Box 812, Harbor Springs, MI 49740. A minimum donation of \$20.00 per person is required. For questions, call Judy Cummings at 231-439-5121. Upon receipt of your check you will receive a letter of confirmation with your tour time.

REMEMBERING... by Stan Stutsman

My first visit to Harbor Springs and surrounding area was during the summer of 1927 when I was 7 years of age. I thought then that it was the most beautiful place I had ever imagined! At 83 years of age, it still is.

That summer my folks, my brother and I were on our way from Elkhart, Indiana to Harbor Springs on vacation. As I recall, most of the roads north of Grand Rapids were graveled and dusty. We were 10 hours on the road, some 300 miles, finally arriving in Harbor Springs where we parked on Main Street about where Claude Layne's drug store might have been. Perhaps it was Hovey's in 1927.

The first person I saw there on the sidewalk was the late Frank Corey, the only police officer in Harbor Springs, walking toward us on his beat. Frank Corey and my father were old friends from years back and I was so impressed that my father personally knew the uniformed lawman! Frank Corey never drove a car and to my knowledge never owned one either. Whenever transportation was needed by Frank, certain local citizens would provide this service.

We tent-camped around the Cross Village/Huckleberry Plains/Sturgeon Bay area, a quiet, unspoiled camper's paradise. One of our campsites was on the bluff directly across from the Catholic Convent just a short way on the main road northeast out of Cross Village. At this spot, my father, who was born in Friendship Township, knew there was a cold, clear, natural spring just over the bluff so we had good drinking and cooking water.

On one particular day, driving through the 'Huckleberry Plains' from Sturgeon Bay toward Cross Village, we came upon an elderly (elderly to me and my brother was anyone 30 or over) Indian lady carrying a heaping full 10-quart pail of huckleberries (blueberries to some) that she had picked. My mother asked my father to stop the car so she could inquire if this lady might sell those huckleberries and she nodded yes. Upon asking what she would want for her berries, her answer was 50 cents! Of course, she wanted to keep the pail. In those days 50 cents had considerably more purchasing power than it does today.

My mother offered this lady a ride into Cross Village, so my brother and I were told to move over and make room for her. We were both excited sitting next to a real, live, friendly and generous Indian lady, a first for both of us. Imagine how tired this lady must have been, walking out to the 'Huckleberry Plains' and part way back, not to mention the tedious task of filling her 10-quart pail with huckleberries!

Co-Presidents' Corner



Greetings all! Many people have remarked that this summer felt more like an old-time Northern Michigan summer, probably due to the cool evenings. Whether you agree, we hope you've enjoyed our varied weather. HSAHS has, although we've been hard at work.

Our garage sale day was dry and sunny, "Grandpa Shay" toasted in the July 4th parade, Shay Days dodged showers (a steamer all the way from England loved the weather), Dave & Yvonne deWindt basked in sunshine at the "Aha" fundraiser booth at the Claymore Shop, and the Jo Ford Park office/gallery has been faithfully manned Tuesday through Saturday by trustees and volunteers regardless of the weather. Our gallery's had numerous visitors and many ask how they can get over to view the lighthouse at Harbor Point. Happily, we can tell them, "Come back October 18th." Thanks to the Harbor Point Association, the lighthouse will be open for public viewing. If you weren't aware of this wonderful opportunity, the lighthouse tour information is included in this newsletter.

Recently, while researching steamship transportation, I found this tidbit on page 112 of 1898 Northern Michigan Handbook for Travelers by J.G. Inglis. Included in the section on principal points of interest in Harbor Springs, the third being Harbor Point Resort, was the following description: *Beyond the hotel on the left lies the dock - where the ferryboats touch regularly - and the walk lies past beautiful summer homes to the tip of the Point where is situated the lighthouse which is open to visitors Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p. m. and is full of interest.* This was eerie to read because the lighthouse will be open the same hours, 9 a. m. to 5 p. m., to visitors on October 18, 2003. History does repeat itself.

The city government moved into their new offices on Zoll Street, so we hope to begin discussing a lease for the old city hall building. We will be hiring an experienced consultant to guide us through the process of a capital campaign to renovate and restore the building for a Harbor Springs area museum. Both the city council and HSAHS agree that establishing a historical district at the entrance of town is a good thing. Our progress will be documented through regular newsletters, mailings, and the local news media.

Please plan to attend our annual meeting, Monday, September 15, 7:00 p.m. at the United Methodist Church, 343 E. Main Street, Harbor Springs. Charlie Conn will present his new slide show, *Logging In Emmet County*. Meanwhile, continue your support by renewing your annual membership, contributing to the "Aha" restoration project, making a lighthouse tour reservation, and telling everyone you meet how excited you are to be part of preserving our area's history by saving the original Emmet County court House and former City Hall of Harbor Springs. Thank you! All the trustees look forward to greeting you in September at the annual meeting.

Sincerely,
Linda Rosenow
HSAHS Co-President

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDAR...



The Harbor Springs Area Historical Society
Annual Meeting
Monday, September 15, 2003 at 7:00 pm
at the United Methodist Church on the corner of Main and
Gardner Streets.

Charlie Conn will present his new slide show,
Logging in Emmet County.

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