

" PARK COPY "

HISTORY OF THE PETOSKEY STATE PARK & AREA

By

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Approx. \_\_\_\_\_ works.

HISTORY OF THE PETOSKEY STATE PARK & AREA

The Petoskey State Park had its' beginning with the creation of the universe, and since that time, nature and the passing seasons have conspired to make it one of the most unique and beautiful spots in the area. Truly, the wooded hills, dunes, and sandy beaches, washed by the blue water of Lake Michiga, make it the "Gem" of Little Traverse Bay.

With exploration and settlement of the area, which is close to the historic Mackinac Straits, much of the surrounding countryside experienced physical changes wrought by man in his attempts to subdue the wilderness. For years this region had been the primary summering place of the Ottawa Indians, and, without a doubt, the Little Traverse Bay area was heavily utilized because of its' character. Fishing on its' blue waters produced lake trout and whitefish in abundance. So it is logical to assume that the acreage which now constitutes the park, was traversed by Indians. In fact, according to "remembering" old-timers' who received their information from pioneer predecessors, there was a portage trail from the shores of Little Traverse Bay, near the south boundry of the park, which went east about one-half mile to Round Lake. The area of the trail does have an old, barely visable foot path located in the more level terrain, thence it was easy for the Indians, Voyageurs, fur traders, missionaries and settlers to navigate their canoes, or water craft down the Inland Waterway to Cheboygan at the mouth of the Cheboygan River. To retrace the route from Round Lake would be across that lake to the Round Lake Creek which emptied into Crooked Lake, thence across the lake to the Crooked River, down the river to Burt Lake, thence down Indian River into Mullet Lake, across that lake to the Cheboygan River, and finally down the river

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to Lake Huron at Cheboygan. This route was a shorter and safer way to Mackinaw Island as opposed to the dangerous Lake Michigan shoreline route to the west.

RECORD STORE

The first recording of what is now the park land was noted in an old abstract and was entered thereon as a Plat of Government Survey of 1840-1841. The first recorded private owner was one Paymegwau, an Ottawa Indian who was selected to receive a part of what is now the park under a treaty concluded July 31, 1855 and is recorded in the Ottawas and Chippewas records, Vol. 6, Page 120, Act of March 31, 1875. Pay-me-gwau evidently wintered in Grand Haven, Ottawa County, Michigan (one of the favored wintering grounds of the Ottawas) and died there in May of 1860. His married daughter, Eliza Keway (Indian maiden name Kaywequam) inherited the property and disposed of it to one Julia Sheehan. From that time other various parcels were acquired by Julia and Daniel Sheehan who sold a small portion to Joel Laberteau who seven years later sold it back to the Sheehans. In 1886 the various parcels of property were sold to William W. Rice who established a tannery on the property and carried on the business of manufacturing, mainly, shoe-sole leather. Rice died in September of 1891 and being a widower left as heirs, 3 sons and 2 daughters. There was much concern at the time in settling the estate as three of the children were minors, and that the property did not lend itself to being broken up and disposed of, so each heir could get a portion. So in order to save the property from loss and dilapidation, George S. Rice, 24 years of age and his married sister, Julia B. Coburn, 21 years of age, proposed a plan for organizing a stock company with a capital of \$50,000.00 to buy the said tannery including: lands with all bark, stock, fixtures and utensils connected with the business.

On December 30, 1891, the Articles of Association were recorded and the company was known as the W.W. Rice Leather Company. The minor children were

each issued 500 shares of stock at \$10.00 each as their share of the estate.

The Rice Leather Company operated until September of 1911 when it was sold to a newly incorporated company called "The Michigan Tanning & Extract Co."

It is interesting to note that the activity generated by the last company still is remembered by living old-timers. A part of that activity centered around the Petoskey Brewing Company located down the railroad tracks north of the tannery about one-half mile, close to Mud Lake; said brewery building still standing there, and until recently used as an antique shop and residence, of Ralph Jordan, Petoskey's only long-time second-hand dealer. The brewery was organized by various residents of the area some being, Fochtman, Bren, Barber and Bremmeyer. The brewery products were called Petoskey Export and Petoskey Sparkel Beer. Off-duty tannery workers, lumbermen, and railroad workers, slacked their thirst with this brew and there was a tavern across the way where these rough-and-ready customers had their times. Remnants of the taverns' business are to be seen in a flat area (now on Park Property) where broken beer bottles were disposed of in ample numbers, possibly attesting to the tempo of the taverns' activities. The brewery remained in operation until prohibition went into effect. The company was dissolved in May of 1925 according to old records bearing the signatures of one Bremmeyer, Secretary, and Angus L. Fochtman, President.

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John Kilborn, Petoskey, still living at this time, remembers hauling bark from beyond the settlement of Epsilon, being as far as 15 miles from the tannery which was located in what was, and still is, called Kegomic. If a teamster left the barns at 4 o'clock in the morning, if everything went well, he might be back with a load of bark by six o'clock that afternoon.

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According to Morell Abbey, retired dog warden of Emmet County, whose dad hauled tan bark, the bark was peeled from the hemlock logs at the cutting site. After the bark was removed from the log it would curl up and would look like canoes on the loaded bob-sleds. The teamsters were paid by weight for the bark and there were various methods used to increase the weight, some of devious nature, such as stopping at an exposed road bank and tossing sand amid the bark. Old pictures of that area show huge piles of hemlock bark in the yarding areas around the tannery buildings. Some of the property which now is park property contained hemlock which was the first to be harvested, and hemlock stumps, being short lived, there is no evidence of this activity left in the park. However, there are small stands of hemlock in the park that must have been too small at the time to harvest.

During the time of the various tannery activities, it was only natural for the development of rail transportation in the area to take place; not only from the standpoint of moving the products produced by the tannery, but also to accomodate the transportation of people, both the natives and the ever increasing influx of resorters, or summering people. Bay View, the Methodist Encampment, a stones throw to the south-west of Kegonic, established around the Civil War period, was coming into full bloom, and the resort areas of Harbor Springs, itself, were booming. To the east and north, Round Lake (Hiawatha Heights), Conway on Crooked Lake, Oden, Alanson and on north to the Straits of Mackinac was becoming noted all through the mid-west as one of the finest summering areas. Petoskey was, more or less, the hub of these activities so it was inevitable that these people should need adequate transportation

around the area and the best media to accomplish it was with rail transportation. Trains, known as dummies, left Petoskey every 15 minutes running to Bay View, Keweenaw and on east, while there was one going to Harbor Springs and returned every half-hour. This line ran along the shoreline at the base of the dunes through what is now park property. With the advent of improved roads and automobile transportation, this line declined to occasional freight use and was finally abandoned in 1962 with the tracks being removed that fall. - TELL ABOUT EXPOSURE SHORING

In 1880 this rail complex was know as the Bay View, Little Traverse & Mackinaw Railroad, and at the turn of the century it became part of the G.R.&I. (Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad. Incidentally, the G.R.&I. was the first rail-road into Petoskey where it terminated, and transportation north was furnished by The Bay View, Little Traverse & Mackinaw Railroad. Later on around 1880 the Chicago & West Michigan Railroad came to Petoskey from Chicago following, more or less, the Lake Michigan shoreline. It also terminated at Petoskey. It later became the Pere Marquette line, and quite recently, a few years before it ceased to come to Petoskey, it was the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad. The depot, of course, is now Little Traverse Historical Society Museum, one of the finest of its kind in Michigan. The old turn-table used to reverse locomotive and cars can still be seen west of the depot in the vicinity of the old coal silos. <sup>= 6' 11" 000</sup> The Pennsylvania depot where hundreds of summering people congregated with their baggage after Labor Day for return to their permanent homes, is now a complex of offices and shops and the many small way-stations that once serviced the dummies have long disappeared, with the Bay View Station being one of the last ones to be razed (in the early 1950's).

Finally the G.R. & I. was absorbed by the Pennsylvania Railroad in the mid-1920's and the last account of the Harbor Springs branch listed it as belonging to the Penndel Company.

Returning to the last mentioned tannery owner, the Michigan Tanning & Extract Company, it is noted in the articles of association that the purpose of the business was to operate plants for the manufacture of leather and extracts; to buy, sell, import, export and generally deal in hides, skins, leather, extracts, bark and tanning materials; to buy, sell, deal and trade in general merchandise. The last item obviously referring to the merchandise sold in the companys' general store which still stands on what is now Lewinski Street, near the Tannery Creek. Also of interest is the fact that at the time the tanning extract made from hemlock bark was the best tanning substance known and much of extract produced by the company was shipped out by railroad tank cars to various other tanneries in the United States.

In 1928 the Michigan Tanning and Extract Company conveyed to the State of Michigan, a strip of land 150 feet wide and of 10 rod length for the purpose of improving the existing road then know as State Trunk Line Road No. U.S.-31. The progress of automobile transportation was making itself felt and was an indicator of what the next forty years, or so, would bring to this part of the state as a recreational mecca for urbanized dwellers from the south. The State Police Post, built in 1968 stands on the residual portion of that property.

The Michigan Tanning & Extract Company expanded and prospered as the years went by and the economy of the area was enhanced by it. It was reported that at its peak 100 to 150 men were employed by this tannery, and according to Mrs. Ed. (Betty) Still, who's mother, Mrs. Herman, ran a boarding house for tannery and railroad workers, there was much activity centered around this boarding house, and, of course, there were always the inevitable "characters" present. Such as the "Pollack" whose only words of English were, "give me meat," which were only uttered at the table; or the Norwegian, George Suka, from the U.P., who could ski, play ball or "Yump" better than anyone else in the tannery gang. Also staying at Tannery Boarding House were a group of "Boys" from Manistee, who moved to Kegonic tannery when the Manistee plant closed down in the 1920's. The lads brought the first bump-jumpers to the Petoskey area, and built them using a barrel stave for runners. THIS WAS NOT JUST COULD BE SEEN

Many tannery families, even at that time, recognized the beauty and recreational value of the beach and dune areas that are now in the park and used it for picnics and outings. One of the pastimes of the picnickers was to go up on Mt. Baldy ( a high dune at the south end of what is now the park) and dig for an Indian chief supposedly buried in a standing position looking out over the bay. No one then, or up to now, has ever been able to find this Indian "of long standing". EXPLAIN TRAIL 200 FT ABOVE 1347

When the Great Depression blighted the country's economy, the Michigan Tanning and Extract Company suffered along with other businesses, but with astute management, managed to survive.

William G. McCune, father of Allen McCune, presently Petoskey real estate broker, was secretary of the company at the time. Many men were

kept on the payroll doing menial tasks such as cutting grass, shoveling snow or watchman duty, for which they were paid \$2.00 per week, which, at the time, would buy food essentials for a small family. *THAT PERIOD*

It was during the later part of The Depression (May 9th, 1934) that the City of Petoskey purchased from the Michigan Tanning & Extract Company the property later known as the Petoskey Bathing Beach. This sale by the company was obviously made for economic reasons brought about by "hard times". However, the city fathers of Petoskey having foresight and the money, purchased the property which included 2700 feet of the best bathing beach area on Little Traverse Bay for the, then, "outrageous" price of \$25,000. The old City Hall, Michigan Tanning & Extract Company's office on Lake Street at the time, was also included in that price. It now is the Abstract office. This, today, is considered a commendable act as otherwise the property might have fallen into private ownership and it would not now be part of the Petoskey State Park. The Visionary City Fathers at the time were:

Mayor- D.C. Levinson

Councilmen-P.D. Miller

-L.R. Sergent

-T.J. Bailey

-E.D. Switzer

Clerk-J.B. Seward

*all dead*  
*SEWARD'S POLICE*  
*ALABAMA*

After times got better, business improved and with the advent of World War II, business hit a boom and good leather foot gear for fighting G.I's became a necessity, and prosperity came to the company.

After the war years business began to decline and in October of 1947 the plant and property was sold to the Howe's Leather Company, a Delaware Corporation. Howes' continued to operate the tannery in the same manner as the previous company, making a few alterations, one of which was forced on them by the awakening and awareness of ecological values. For years the offal, wastes and slippage from raw hide processing was emptied into the nearby bay. This not only enriched and polluted the water, but visual signs became unbearable to people living in the area. So Howe's Leather Company was forced to build a discharge line up into the hills which emptied into a 13 acre settling basin. This settling basin was enclosed by 30 foot earth dikes. This solved the pollution problem in the bay but caused a stench in the immediate area which permeated the atmosphere down to the residences on the highway (M-131), and at times was almost unbearable. This to a certain extent held up residential development along the highway. HOWE'S LEATHER CO. \$12,000

Howe's continued to operate for a number of years with declining revenue. As the profits dwindled, it became apparent that conditions beyond the operators control would eventually close its' doors. In order to bolster declining revenue, the New York University assumed management of Howe's in order to receive tax relief extended to educational institutions, but this failed to bolster income. Imported raw hides were being shipped from as far away as South America, plus the high cost of

tanning extracts shipped in by rail, plus the introduction of man-made substitutes for leather forecast the end. In the fall of 1950, Howe's Leather Company closed its' door on operation and history. So ended 64 years of a business that had touched directly the lives and well being of hundreds of people living in the immediate area, and indirectly thousands of people who might have at one time or other, worn a product or portion thereof that had been manufactured by one of the three companies operating the facilities.

An interesting happening in the spring of 1954 which propelled the park area back into the pre-historic era was the discovery of a "mastodons tooth" near an old dump that had been used by the people living in the factory houses for years. When the dump was closed by the State due to sanitary reasons a bulldozer was called in to cover it up. Mrs. Ed. Still taking a walk in the area where a bank had been used for fill dirt, noticed an object protruding from the soil. She recovered it and it was sent to the University of Michigan for identification. It was identified as a mastodons molar. There is a possibility that the rest of the bones are somewhere in the undisturbed bank.

After its' demise Howe's sold the tannery buildings and property they were on, plus the factory owned homes to private interests composed of local business men. Many of the buildings were razed with a few being kept for storage purposes. Most of the residences are gone making way for a large Gaintway Shopping Center and parking lot. One home that stood near the main highway and is now part of the parking lot was destroyed by fire after Howe's sold out, and a young girl (Deverse) was burned to

death. One of the houses still remaining (1972) stands on Lewinski Street with the Tannery Creek running by its' back door. The Edward Still family lives there and three generations of that family have lived there. It will soon be bulldozed out of existance - the victim of progress. The water tank still stands as well as the 100 ft. brick chimney from which belched black coal smoke used to fire the boilers which generated the power to produce electricity to run the machinery and along the railroad right-of-way on old switching semaphore still stands attesting to the name of the area "Kegomic." - *St. Louis*

A few years later John Kilborn, State Representative of the 10th District, also former Emmet County Sheriff, introduced a bill in the House to have the State Of Michigan acquire the remainder of the Howe's Leather Company's property for the purpose of creating a State Park. The bill was passed in the House and then went to the Senate where Thomas Schweigert, then Senator from this district, successfully guided it to adoption, Governor Romney signed the bill and this was the beginning of the "Petoskey State Park."

In June of 1962 the ~~17,549~~ acres of land was purchased by the State at \$712.29 per acre for a total price of \$125,000.00. The property lay dormant pending the purchase of the Petoskey Bathing Beach property.

There was much controversy over the pending possibility of the city owned beach property being sold to the State. Public meetings were held and discussions became heated at times.

It was finally decided to put the issue on the Spring Election Ballot along with names of candidates for city offices. On April 1st of 1968 the people of Petoskey went to the polls and voted 1226 to 243 to sell the property to the State of Michigan for \$150,000.00.

On May 21, 1969 the deed conveying the beach property to the State of Michigan was signed by Mayor Fletcher Johnson, and City Clerk, Virginia Hubbard.

Bids had been let for the development of the Parks' campsite area prior to the acquisition of the Petoskey Bathing Beach property. Alternate plans had been made with an entrance road other than the one going to the beach area.

Hodgkiss & Douma, Inc. had the successful bid and began road construction to the proposed campground from the existing hard top road on July 13, 1969. This development cost was financed by the Federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and the State of Michigan on a matching fund basis at \$135,000.00, but ran over to a cost of \$150,000.00. This included a toilet and bath house, water system, sewage disposal system and 90 campsites.

On June 16, 1969 two permanent park personnel began their duties at the park. Ross Dodge, a former assistant manager at Ludington State Park assumed managership. Dana Houseworth, assistant manager at Orchard Beach State Park, transferred to the Petoskey State Park. Two seasonal rangers and two lifeguards were also employed for the summer months.

No entrance fees were collected that summer, and personnel kept busy by picking up the debris on the beach which had accumulated over the years of City ownership. Thirteen dump truck loads of broken glass, cans, paper, driftwood and the discards of careless human use was collected.

The first Contact Station was a surplus Airforce portable radar station. It was an uncomfortable building to use as an office. The floor of steel decking was cold and in the following winter, frost covered the floor and up the walls to where the heat started. Light was furnished by propane gas as well as being used for a small heater.

On November 3rd, 1969, Reginald Sharkey, a veteran of 23 years with the Fish Division, transferred to the Park Division and the Petoskey State Park as permanent Ranger. In the same month construction was started on the Office-Shop-Garage Building. Much difficulty was experienced in its construction due to inclement weather. Inmate crews were used to assist. Water and gravel had to be heated for proper mixing. We experienced temperatures of 33° below zero. We also had great difficulty in starting vehicles which were stored outside.

During the winter's construction of the mentioned building we were observed by a red fox setting on a hill overlooking the site, almost daily.

On May 1, 1970, the first motor vehicle permit was sold to Mr. John Deschemler, Work Camp Foreman out of Pellston Camp.

May 8th, 1970 that portion of the road leading from the Park Entrance to the beach was abandoned by the Emmet County Road Commission and it became park property.

On July 12th, after 3 weeks of frustrating water well problems, the campground was opened for camping and Mr. & Mrs. Robert Marans and two daughters of Ann Arbor, Michigan were the first campers on the grounds when they pitched their tent in six minutes flat.

We did not operate at only about half capacity, and this was fortunate for we again experienced Well Trouble and forced us to close the toilet building on July 26th and did not get the problem corrected until August the 12th.

On August 18, 1970, 16 acres of park property on the South boundary next to the Michigan State Police Post was leased for 50 years to the Ottawa-Chippewa Arts and Crafts Cooperative, to be developed and used as an Indian Culture Center to perpetuate and preserve ancient arts and crafts and to manufacture, display and market such products. Encouragement was given by United States Senators & Congressmen as well as by State Legislators and many Municipal and Civic organization. If it materialize it should be an important asset to Park development.

The New Contact Station was begun and the Shop-Office-Garage building was nearing completion, except for interior furnishing.

That winter 1970-71 we finished the inside of both the Contact Station and Shop-Office-Garage buildings. We experienced one of the worst winters, snowwise, that ever came to this area and it was a problem to keep the road open from M-131 to the afore mentioned buildings.

Beginning on March 30, 1971, the U.S. Soil Conservation Service and the Department of Natural Resources did a dune stabilization project in an attempt to stop the advance of the dunes into the camping area. Boy Scouts did part of the planting, and inmate crews did the bulk of the work planting 52,000 clumps of dune grass, in addition to various vines and shrubs.

From Memorial day on, we were 75% full, but beginning 4th of July week-end, we were full practically ever day until after Labor Day with many turn-aways each day.

On June the 25th 1971, in the early morning, the Park experienced its first crime wave. Seems an inebriated Indian maiden went on the warpath and knifed one innocent white male Caucasian, whom she mistook for her lover, in the area of the lower rib cage. The knife (steak) had been stolen from a nearby campers' eating tent which was throughly ransacked and vandalized. Other than that, teenage "pet" parties were annoying, but handled without too much difficulty.

During the fall of 1971 the park staff, with inmate labor, reworked the campsites trying to overcome the errors of bad planning.

In October approval by the Lands Division was granted to obtain 9.55 acres at \$3,560.25 per acres (total \$34,000.00) on the north boundry of Park for a new roadway entrance, from M-131 into the park. This property formerly belonged to the Menonaqua Beach Association.

Various projects were carried on to improve the office storage capacities along with the planned renewal and design of all display boards in District V carried on by Park Naturalist, Robert Pintal and Ranger Sharkey at the Petoskey State Park.

The year closed out with Park Personnel going to Wilderness State Park for their Annual District 5 Christmas Party.

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