

BIRTH OF PETOSKEY IS TOLD BY OLD PIONEER

IT WAS IN 1873, SAYS HENRY McCONNELL, THAT CITY WAS BORN AND BECAME KNOWN TO OUTSIDE WORLD.

Veteran Tourist Inn Keeper Of Northern Michigan Tells Of Coming Of First Railroad Train And Other Interesting Bits Of Local History.

Volume V of the Michigan History Magazine, published quarterly by the Michigan Historical Commission with headquarters at Lansing, contains the following interesting article on the early days of Petoskey, written by Henry McConnell, now owner of a large farm on Walloon Lake, and who spends his winters in the city.

The publication of the article by the authentic Historical Commission is considered a distinct honor to Mr. McConnell, and it supplies a well written view of the opening period of the city's history.

By Henry McConnell, Walloon Lake.

The year 1873 was a memorable one for the Little Traverse region. In this year Petoskey was born, found a place on the map, was recognized by the fourth estate, and entered upon her career of fame and fortune. Is it too early to suggest that the semi-centennial of Petoskey's birth might be fittingly celebrated by a widely advertised home-coming celebration in 1923?

Petoskeyites are home-lovers, and such a celebration would appeal to them. No matter where they are or how far they wander, they always have a warm feeling in their hearts for old Petoskey. Then, why not get together in 1923? Let us, to use an old expression, "talk it over with Brown," and the suggestion may lead to something.

Indian Field in 1873

In July of 1873 the site of Petoskey was an Indian field, bounded by the river, the bay and the hills. It was overgrown with June grass, uncultivated except for a small plot where the Petoskey Wholesale Grocery now stands. This plot was planted to potatoes. Here, also was a small house of logs; another was on the site of the Ramsdell block, while a third was on the bluff, at the site of the Union depot. These were occupied by Indians.

On the beach east of the river lay the dock and storehouse of H.O. Rose, built the previous year. Up the river on the site of the paper mill was the mill of Hazen Ingalls. He had a store and a small clearing set out mainly to fruit trees. Here, too, was a saloon operated by Jackson Ingalls.

Farther south, at the edge of the upper plateau, stood the mission school of Andrew Porter. Here was an extensive cultivated clearing. The postoffice, Bear River, was at the mission, Mr. Porter being postmaster. The river was crossed near its mouth by a log bridge.

West along the beach was the Indian village, centered about a log chapel and its cemetery, each grave bearing a wooden cross decorated with bright cloth or ribbons. The mission was served by the priest stationed at Little Traverse. On the parish records this was known as the mission of Agaming, the chapel being St. Paul's, erected some time in the '30s. Here, early in June of 1859, the venerable Bishop Baraga officiated in the chapel and said mass in the house of Joseph Trottreaud, who had given an acre of ground for the erection of a new church – which, evidently, was never built.

Chief Active Warrior.

Pitasige, as the name was then written, was the head man of the village. During the war of 1812 he, in common with the other Ottawas of Michigan, espoused the British cause, assisting at the capture of Fort Mackinac and fighting gallantly in the battle of the following year when the Americans failed disastrously to recapture it. So bitter were the Ottawas against the American, that after

peace was proclaimed Colonel McDonal, British commander at Mackinac, himself went to the Arbre Croche villages, persuading them to keep the peace.

After the war, Petoskey, then a resident of one of the Arbre Croche villages, removed with his clan to the mouth of the Bear river. The village, known as Akatchaming, was never a large one. The Indian census of the '40s and '50s gave the population as from 40 to 75 souls. In 1873 there were only about 15 log houses in the village.

In August of 1873 the railroad grading began. The iron gang followed closely, so that early in October the last rail was laid and the whistle of a locomotive heard for the first time in Petoskey. Before Nov. 1 the ballasting was done and the road practically finished.

Some few of the workers remained for the winter. It was about this time that the wife of William McCloud fell into a fire and received mortal burns; this accident gave Petoskey her first mention in the columns of a newspaper. The Morning Democrat, Grand Rapids, gives an account of this in its local columns under date of Nov. 15, 1873. The press had overlooked a prior happening during August, when a skiff landed on the beach bearing a man and a boy, the former in a dying condition. He was buried by the railroad hands, east of the grade, where it now crosses Emmet street. A fence was placed around the grave and it was a landmark for some years.

First Train November 12.

On the evening of Nov. 12 long drawn-out whistles announced the advent of the inspection train, which halted at Lake Street. It consisted of a baggage car, the official's car of the G. R. & I. and the director's car of the Pennsylvania Central. Among the arrivals were General Cass, president of the Pennsylvania; Governor Bagley, the Talcott brothers, chief contractors; P. R. L. Pierce, of the land department; Cobb, state land commissioner; Wallin and O'Rourke, superintendents of the G. R. & I., and some reporters. One of these

proved to be an old school friend of mine, George Gage, reporter for the Grand Rapids Daily Times.

George and I had a short talk. He was not enthusiastic about our town, and small wonder! The ground was covered with a wet, slushy snow; the air was damp, misty and disagreeable, and the prospect unpleasant. George thought it might be fine here in the summer, and in time the place might be a town, but—I met him some years after, and he had changed his mind.

Few of the distinguished passengers appeared, Governor Bagley came out on the platform, looked around, and went back. The train remained only long enough to follow the same procedure.

Shaw and McMillan had platted the tract of land at rail-head, then enjoyed a controversy with the railroad regarding the right of way. The company refused to build a depot on their plat unless they were given an additional hundred feet of frontage. This necessitated a re-platting, with the result that H. O. Rose, who had platted the tract just south, put his plat on record first, under the name of Petoskey City. Before this matter was settled Dave Cushman, who had then begun erection of the Cushman House, was obliged to move the frame 50 feet back from the tracks.

During the fall Captain Rose began his store building on Mitchell street. The lumber was brought from Traverse City by boat. A number of buildings, some temporary shacks, were put up at this time. Dr. Little raised the frame of the Rose house on New Year's Day. This stood on the site of the Elk's hall. He managed it until his death in 1875, when it was sold to D. C. Bradley and the name changed to the Occidental.

Homesteaders Come.

When winter set in Petoskey had a population of 50 or 60. The majority were railroad hands who soon drifted elsewhere. In the following summer I met some of them at work on the C. S. & C. R. R. in Montcalm county. A few, however, remained and entered homesteads. The winter was mild, the two saloons did a good business, and at times things were lively. Early in the spring a

depot was built on the site of the suburban depot, with M. F. Quaintance as agent, and trains made regular trips—one passenger daily each way and a tri-weekly freight. Sometimes it would try weekly, at others it would try weakly. I think John Hobbins, father of the automobile dealer, was the first foreman on this section.

During the winter a petition was circulated to remove the postoffice from the mission. This was granted, the name was changed to Petoskey City, and Dr. Little, the first postmaster, kept the office in the Rose house.

Since those days the growth of Petoskey has been slow, steady and substantial. Local option can no longer, thank Heaven, terrify with its threats to stop the tourists; and nothing can keep Petoskey down! It is a far cry from the snow and slush of that first winter—from the ramshackle houses, the pioneering conditions, the discomforts and hardships, to the present beautiful city that crowns the bluffs of Little Traverse Bay—the city that is known throughout the country as the Summer Queen of the North.

Photos included with this article:

- Another view of Petoskey in about 1885. Looking southwest from upper Lake street.
- A scene on Bear River in days gone by. Pile of logs hauled to banking ground near present McManus mill.
- An early view of G. R. & I. Park and of the old G. R. & I. Passenger Station destroyed by lightning some years ago.
- The Pere Marquette Station and Park looking east from Bear River. First and only station of this road in Petoskey.
- First G. R. & I. Railroad Passenger Station. Now used as Present Freight Station.
- Looking west on Lake street from part way up the hill in 1880.
- M. F. Quaintance, as he looked shortly after taking charge of the Petoskey station for the G. R. & I.
- First bridge over Mitchell street, looking east from the west side of the bridge.

- An early dam over Bear River at or near the site of present city light and power plant. It was constructed in 1878.

The Petoskey Evening News

October 13, 1921