

South Manitou Island

A General Description

Nov. 27, 1884

(Apparently from the Grand Traverse Herald)

The island of South Manitou lies on the east side of Lake Michigan, seven and a half miles in a northerly direction from Sleeping Bear point, and contains about 5,000 acres. A high range of hills extends along the west, northwest and north side of the island, averaging more than 300 feet in height, protecting the lower portion of the island considerably from the severe winter storms. The soil is of a sandy loam, very productive. Good crops of wheat, rye, oats, barley, corn and potatoes are raised, and fruit also, such as apples, pears, plums, currants, etc., do well. The climate is healthful and invigorating, it being neither severely cold in the winter, nor very warm in the summer, the thermometer not going lower than 13 below zero in the severest winter weather, nor above 88 during the warmest summer weather, for the last eight years. The summer season in general being cool it would be a pleasant summer resort for those who wish to escape the heat and privations of city life during the summer months. The population is about 100, of Germans, English, Scandinavian, Irish, and American nationality, mostly German; the principle part of whom are farmers, some are fisherman. There are a good many fish caught in the vicinity of the island, principally in trap nets. The island has been organized into a township. There is a post office on the island, but there is no established mail route from Glen Haven, distant eight miles, the mail being mostly carried by the inhabitants. The farmers have sent most of their produce to Milwaukee until this year, the propellers of the Northern Transportation Line stopping whenever desired for freight or passengers. But this year considerable grain has been sent to Hannah, Lay & Co's, mills at Traverse City from this island, and more flour, bran and middlings have been received in return, than from any other mills to which it has been sent hitherto. Considerable advantage is also gained by trading at Traverse City, as groceries, provisions, etc. etc. can be bought as cheap there as at Milwaukee, and everything the people want can be had there also, especially at the Hannah & Lay Mercantile Co's store. The staunch and fast sailing steamer, Lou A. Cummings, of Grand Haven, Capt. G. Robertson commanding, plying between Frankfort and Traverse City and stopping at all intermediate points, stops at the island twice a week during the season, going both ways, carrying passengers and freight, thereby making it very convenient for the inhabitants or anyone traveling that way to make connections with other boats, or to go to either Frankfort or Traverse City. She also carried the mail to and from the island part of the time last summer.

There should be telegraph communication with the island, as a great number of vessels and steamers stop there during the season in stormy weather, the island having a splendid harbor, easy of access and affording good protection from all storms for steamers and vessels that navigate the Lake Michigan. Frequently also wrecks happen within the vicinity so that with a telegraph station on the island vessel masters may be enabled to telegraph for assistance when in distress, and owners of vessels and steamers may be notified of the whereabouts and condition of their sailcraft, thereby saving considerable money and anxiety now caused by inability to cross the passage to the mainland during stormy weather in time, causing unnecessary and often serious delays thereby. It would be to the interest of all shipping to see that it was done.

Messrs Wm. A. Burton and Capt. W. W. Gordon have built a gravel dock at the island of the capacity of 300 cubic yards and expect to ship considerable gravel next summer. There is generally considerable steam boat and market wood shipped during the season, but this past season has been unusually dull in this respect. The gravel dock is built on the plan of an iron ore dock having bins and shutes for lifting the gravel into vessels, and an engine and cars and trail track for running the gravel into bins from the beach.

There are prospects of a hotel and some cottages being built here next season. M.K.

(transcript)