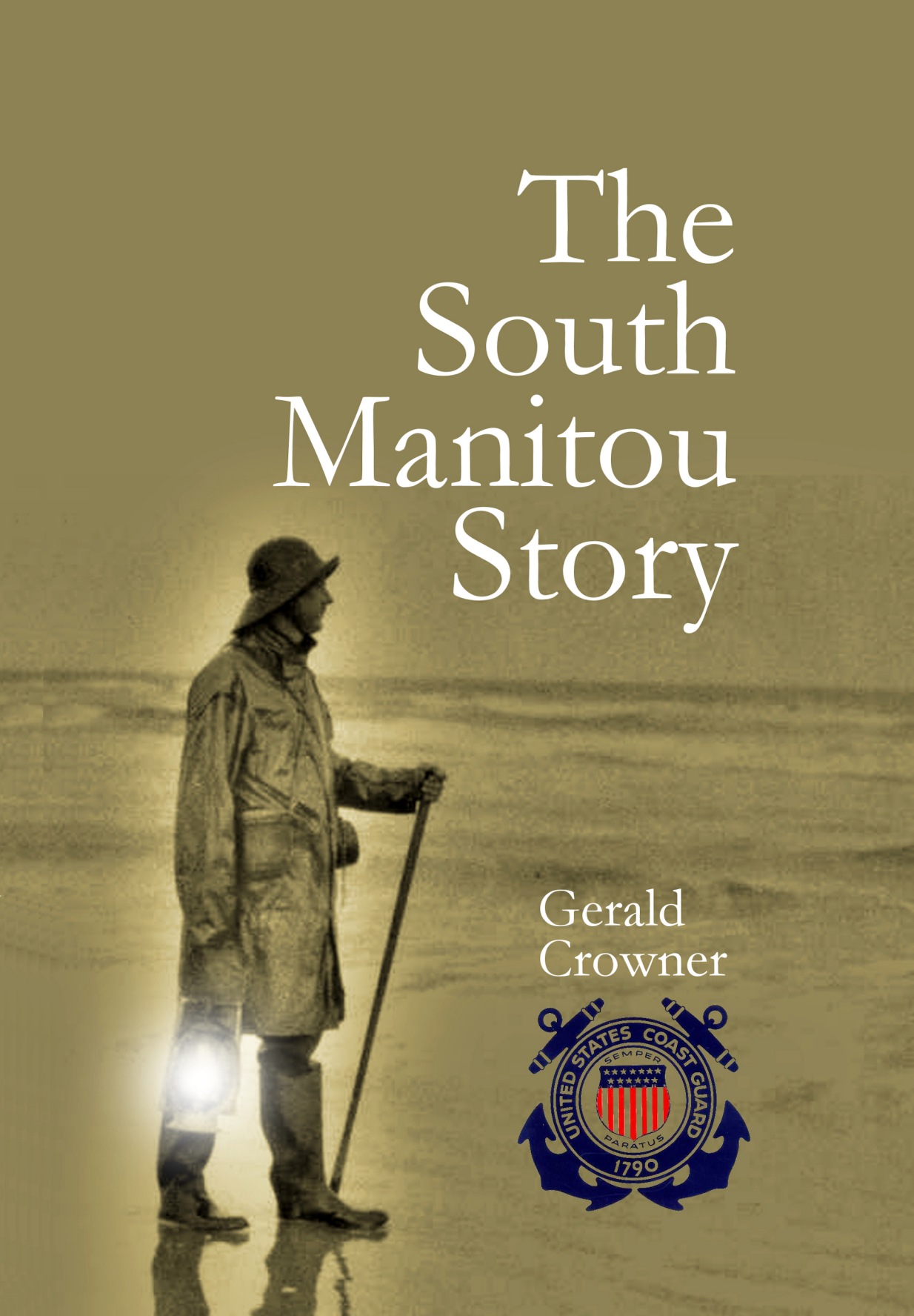
The South Manitou Story



Gerald Crowner

The South Manitou Story

Gerald E. Crowner
Surfman, South Manitou Station
1926-1928

Published and printed in the United States.

Book Description: A memoir of a young Coast Guardsman's first tour of duty as a surfman on South Manitou Island. Sometimes hilarious, sometimes heartrending, Crowner's charming mix of narratives and poetry is pure entertainment.

Publishers Cataloging in Publication Data

Crowner, Gerald E.
The South Manitou Story– Second Edition –
Published July 2007
p. cm.

ISBN: none
1. U.S. Coast Guard. 2. South Manitou Island.
3. Lake Michigan. 4. Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. I. Crowner, Gerald E. II
Title

PS126.C76 2007
920 – dc22

BISAC: BIO026000
LCCN: 2007000000

This little book is
dedicated, with
affection, to
Fred and Bea Burdick.
and to
Mike and Marie Smith.
Fred and Bea had the little
store and the beautiful
cabins at Lake Florence.
Mike and Marie operated
the little Motel
that Mike built on the Point.
All four of these fine people
did much for South Manitou,
by providing excellent quarters
for all who wished to vacation on
the Island and enjoy its beauty.
They will be long remembered
by those who were privileged
to vacation there.

And …
Special gratitude to Betty Kramer,
Myron Vent and others, whose
encouragement made this little book possible.

FOR SANDRA

To my granddaughter, Sandra, goes special thanks for her excellent job of typing the stories.

***

Gerald E. Crowner
Surfman, South Manitou Station
September 1927

God Created An Island

God created an Island
On the vastness of a
Beautiful lake,
Carved the valleys
And ridges and
Filled them with
Beautiful flowers
and trees,
Sprinkled a myriad of
Colored stones on the
Sandy shores, and made
Them gleam and sparkle,
When bathed by
Summer waves.
Beautiful Island, that
Filled my heart with
Memories of
Other days.

***

Introduction

My immediate family and the grandchildren have endured my story telling for years. Tales of the Island were interesting to them and to friends alike. I have endeavored to describe in little word pictures, life as it was there in the mid-20's. South Manitou is a beautiful place and much more has been written about it in Myron Vent's book entitled, ***South Manitou Island - From Pioneer Community to National Park***. It is rich in historical lore.

When I was stationed there, able crews manned the Lighthouse and Coast Guard Station. Several farms were still being tilled. The little schoolhouse was attended by the Island children and taught by a full-time teacher. The Post-Office was stationed in the little store. We were a close knit small community and visitors were few and far between. Nearly half a century has elapsed since I was a member of the South Manitou Island Coast Guard crew, but dear to my memory are the days I spent there.

The Island has changed now. Gone are the Lighthouse and Coast Guard crews. The farmlands no longer exist. Many of those I knew now lie peacefully in the little Island Cemetery. But the surf still pounds on her rock strewn shore as it did those years ago, and summer breezes ever caress the beautiful woodlands. Hopefully, it will ever remain that way for all to enjoy.

***

Tread softly and
break no branches,
Lest you mar the beauty
of this lovely island.

The Beginning

My Grandfather Peck was a member of the old Life Saving Service long before it became known as the United States Coast Guard. He was a member of the Pentwater crew under Captain Ewald and many were the tales he told of shipwrecks and rescues. Those were days of sail, and a surfboat manned by an eight man crew pulled their way into many a storm to effect a rescue or give assistance to a stranded sailing vessel.

We lived in Hart before moving to Pentwater in 1918. Train service was just about the only means of travel in those days and countless are the times that I took the train to Pentwater to visit Grandfather's house. Their home was near the channel and adjacent to the Life Saving Station.

Captain Ewald's son Arden was several years older than I, but we were real pals and I spent many days around the old Life Saving Station, watching the boat drills, the signal sessions and the beach cart drills. I am sure I spent more time there than I did with Grandmother Peck. Grandfather left the Life Saving Service in 1912.

Later, after the U.S.L.S.S. became known as the Coast Guard, Captain Pearson was Officer in Charge of the Pentwater Station. His son Stanley and I were close friends. I was older then, but the Coast Guard was still the greater part of my life. I sat in on their drills, made patrols with crewmembers and even memorized part of the drills in the Blue Book.

In 1920 I was fifteen years old and tall and rangy for my age. There were crew vacancies at Pentwater Station the summer of 1920 and Captain Pearson signed me up as a temporary Surfman. I'll never forget the thrill of standing my first watch, my first beach patrol and the boat drills. It was a summer's job and I loved every day of it. In 1921, there was another vacancy and in June of that year I was

again chosen to serve as a temporary Surfman. However, the joy of it all was suddenly terminated. The Pentwater Station was put on an inactive basis and her crew transferred to other units in the 10th District. It was a sad ending to my Coast Guard career. Captain Pearson was still in charge of the Station and was assisted by William Dipert, BM1C and Louis Helienbolt, MoM1C. I spent many hours in the Crew's quarters with those old buddies of mine, but much of the thrill was gone. No patrols were made, no watches stood, no drill sessions and our beautiful surfboat never wet her keel. The years I spent around the Pentwater Station did create within me a desire for the Coast Guard, which was fulfilled a few years later at South Manitou Island.

Father found employment in Grand Haven and we moved there from Pentwater in the summer of 1923. I graduated from high school at Grand Haven in 1925. I drifted around from one job to another until the spring of '26 and then secured a job with the Steketee Sign Company of Muskegon as a sign painter apprentice. The wages were poor, making it hard to save any money, but I did remain there for nearly nine months.

Christmas in 1926 found me at Pentwater to spend the day with my family. Dad, mother and the children had moved back to the old hometown and father was in the hardware business with Grandfather Peck. Christmas evening we went to Hart to visit Uncle Warren and Aunt Mamie. Uncle Warren was a banker and while we were discussing my financial problems, he uttered one sentence that I'll never forget. "Why don't you try the Coast Guard," he said. "You could save more money there." That was the spark that ignited all the events that were to follow during the next few days.

The next morning I left Pentwater on the bus without divulging my plans to mother and father. They assumed that I was heading for Muskegon and my job at

Steketees, but that wasn't in the master plan! I was bound for Grand Haven and upon arriving there I headed immediately for the Tenth District offices of the Coast Guard. Inspector Benson and VanLopik remembered me as the temporary Surfman at Pentwater Station. After some visiting, I told them that I wanted to join the Coast Guard if they had any vacancies. Then Inspector Benson gave me the sad news. No vacancies were available in the Tenth. There had been one at Frankfort, but it had been filled recently. I was really disappointed, but Inspector Benson promised to notify me immediately when another vacancy occurred. That was my only consolation. After some more visiting, I left the office and headed down the long stairway. The only bright spot of the morning was Inspector Benson's promise of enlistment at a future date. My spirits were considerably dampened, to be sure. I was at the street door and about to open it when Van leaned over the stair railing and called out to me, "Crowner, come back up here. We've got news for you!" I couldn't imagine what they wanted, but man alive, I did go back up those stairs two at a time! Inspector Benson came right to the point. He had overlooked a vacancy at South Manitou Island, and I could have it if I would accept Island duty. That was the break! "Yes sir, I'll accept." was my reply and I was the happiest guy in Michigan!

The next hour and a half were rapid fire to say the least. I called Captain Fisher at South Island. Phone connections to the Island were poor and my message was relayed through Sleeping Bear Station to Captain Fisher. He told me to get my physical exam and official papers and report as soon as possible. The physical was passed at Dr. Cherry's and I returned to the office for my enlistment papers. Van took my fingerprints. He told me that Captain Fisher didn't like to fool around with them. In parting, Inspector Benson said he was sure I would like the Island

and added that Bill was a good skipper and had a good crew. I left the office walking on clouds!

Uncle Ernest, who lived at Grand Haven at that time, took me to Muskegon that evening. We stopped at Mr. Steketee's home and he was dismayed to learn that I was leaving. He promised me a nice raise if I would stay with them. I told him it was too late because I was committed to the Coast Guard.

Then on to the McLennen home where I roomed and boarded. I thanked Uncle Ernest for the ride and he wished me well before returning to Grand Haven.

The McLennens were sorry that I was leaving, but thought the Coast Guard would be a wonderful experience. A son, Laurel, was visiting his parents at the time and he offered to take me to Pentwater in the morning. That was a real break because I had a lot of luggage and bus travel would have been difficult.

We arrived at Pentwater the next afternoon and Mother and Dad were aghast upon learning of my plans. They never dreamed I would do a thing like that! Everything had happened so fast that I even wondered how it all came about.

Two hours after I arrived home I had my gear packed. Uncle Will's son Ted said he would drive me to Baldwin, where I could catch the 7:30 train for Traverse City. Mother went with us. The train was on time and after another farewell, I was on my way to South Manitou. Mother hated to see me go. She was always the worrying kind and was concerned about me being on an island way out in Lake Michigan! I assured her that I would be all right and not to worry about me. I doubt if my assurances consoled her very much.

The ride to Traverse City was uneventful. It was snowing and blowing when we arrived. I put up in a hotel and awaited the morning.

It was a cloudy, windy morning when I awoke. Little Traverse Bay was full of white caps before the north wind. After breakfast I called Captain Fisher and told him I was in Traverse City. He said there was a considerable sea running, but if it moderated towards evening, they would get across to Glen Haven to get me.

I took the Manistee and North Eastern mixed train to Cedar and then hitched a ride with the mailman to Glen Haven. We arrived at the D. H. Day grocery store and post office late that afternoon. The wind had abated somewhat.

Mr. Day called the Island for me and said the South Island boys were on the way to pick me up. That was good news! The ride in the mail truck had chilled me all the way through.

After warming up beside the big stove in the store, I went down to the dock to look at Lake Michigan. Through the gathering darkness, I could see South Manitou lying low on the horizon to northward. The lighthouse there was sending forth a welcoming beam. The clouds had broken up and several stars twinkled in the dark sky. It was difficult to describe my happiness as I returned to the store to await the arrival of the South Island boat.

***

The Crossing
December 28, 1926

Have you ever wondered how a place looked before you saw it? As I sat by the big stove in the Day store that cold, blustery night awaiting the arrival of the South Island boat, I tried to imagine what the Island looked like. I knew how the Station proper would appear. It would be white and all Spic and Span inside and out. The crew would be a rugged bunch of lads and because they were an Island crew they would be good sailors. From what I saw of the Island in that December twilight, I knew it had high west side bluffs and tapered to a point eastward. Its lighthouse beam was brilliant and steady. I had a deep inward feeling that I would like all I saw the next day.

Then the store door opened. August Warner was the first person I saw from South Island. He was ruddy faced beneath an ear flapped cap and smoking a pipe. Over his shoulder he carried a mail sack. He could be none other than the South Island Mailman, and he introduced himself as such. Following him were two Coast Guards, Alfred Anderson and Robert Johnson, both husky men. They welcomed me with good hard handshakes. Our conversation was brief. August had the return mail to pick up along with two boxes of groceries and my luggage. We loaded the large wheelbarrow, which stood outside the doorway and started for the dock. They had made the crossing with the Liberty, which was the crew's boat. She was about a 26-footer, three-quarter cabined, powered with a one cylinder, 7-horsepower Gray engine and tiller steered.

We were soon loaded and on our way. The Gray's exhaust was staccato and sounded much like a machine gun! The sea had slacked off to three and four foot waves and the Liberty was slicing into them at about six knots, sending the spray the length of her. Bob and I were atop the mailbags near the bow. Soon her forward windows were iced up and South Island light was a blob of light through the translucent panes. August was steering and the breeze sent showers of sparks to leeward from his pipe. Bob and I visited most of the way across. He told me they were glad to have me as a crewmember because it brought the crew to full strength. One member had transferred to a mainshore station in December, which left South Island a man shy of a full crew. No enlistments could be made after December 31, so I was joining up just in time.

We were about an hour and a quarter making the crossing that chilly night. August immediately set off for the store, his wheelbarrow loaded with the mail and groceries. Bob and Al helped me with my luggage and we headed for the station. As we entered the building the first thing I noticed was the aroma of food being prepared. More noticeable, I presume, because I was very hungry. Breakfast at Traverse City and some candy bars on my journey to Glen Haven was the extent of my food that day. My luggage was dropped in the crew's quarters and Ted Crain announced that a late supper was about ready. Captain Fisher strode into the room from his quarters across the hall and greeted me warmly. He was a rather tall man, slightly bald and smoking a pipe. Everyone seemed glad to have me there and their warm welcome made me happy.

Our belated supper was delicious. I can't recall the menu, but I do remember the fried spuds, the meat and the pie for dessert. And I know I ate more than my share because I was famished! A large brass lamp sat in the middle of our large table and it reminded me of the lamp Grandma had on her table years ago. It was a little hard for me to get used to the lamplight. It was so different from the glare of the electric lights on the mainshore. After our hearty meal and some more visiting Al took me up to the sleeping room and I was shown my bunk and clothes locker. A lantern at the top of the stairway cast a soft glow over the upstairs hallway and into the sleeping room. Several crewmembers were sacked out so we made as little noise as possible.

We returned to the crew's quarters and sat around and visited awhile. Then, after removing our shoes and placing them near the stove, we climbed the banistered stairway to our sleeping quarters. How good that bunk felt as I stretched out and pulled up the blankets over me! I lay quietly awhile, listening to the rhythmic pulse of the surf. The wind was light now, but the halyards on the steel flag tower still thrummed faintly.

At last I was at South Manitou! It was December 28th, just three days after I made plans to join the Coast Guard. It seemed incredible that so much could happen in just three short days. I am here, I thought, and almost had to pinch myself for fear it was only a dream. From the lookout came the sharp ring of five bells, ten thirty, and that's all I remembered.

***

The First Day

I awoke early. It was still dark. The wind had abated completely and there were no surf sounds. I could hear Crain moving around quietly in the mess room downstairs. Someone put wood in the stove in the crew's quarters and wasn't too quiet about his task. Then from the lookout, out on the Point, came the clear five bells. Evidently Crain awaited that signal because his coffee grinder erupted with a great roaring noise, sounding much like an approaching tornado! Then Mackey was climbing the stairs. He entered the sleeping room with a loud "O.K. gang! Hit the deck. 6:30." That was the start of the day for all of us. It was December 29, l926 – my first day on South Manitou Island.

I didn't take part in the morning cleanup that day, but I did my share of it several hundred times during the months that followed.

Lamps and lanterns were cleaned, trimmed and filled. Hallways were brushed clean; the wood-boxes were replenished; sidewalks were swept; the cuspidors and ash trays were cleaned; the stairway was dusted and each man made up his bed, after which it was inspected by Mackey, and if it didn't meet his approval it was done over. It had to be neat and smooth.

After the clean up duties were completed it was time for breakfast. Then followed a bull session in the crew's quarters before muster. At 8 bells Old Glory was hoisted on the flag tower while the crew stood at attention and saluted. The lookout watch rang a slow 8-bells, sounding the last two just as the ensign was unfurled. This happened every morning, rain or shine, snow or sleet! On the morning of December 29, 1926, a ten-man crew manned South Island's Station.

Following are the names of those men answering crew muster that morning:

William Fisher, CBM, Officer in Charge
Willis Mackey, BM1c
Leon Barrett, MoMlc
Alfred Anderson, Surfman
Robert Johnson, Surfman
Ralph Rhompson, Surfman
Clifford Deering, Surfman
Al VanderWagen, Surfman
Theodore Crain, Surfman (Cook)
Gerald Crowner, Surfman

I was assigned the lookout watch that first morning. It was the longest watch of the day, lasting from 8:00 a.m. 'til noon. I was glad to be in the lookout that morning because it gave me an excellent opportunity to look over the Island, at least as much of it as I could view from the lookout.

Our lookout was located several hundred feet east of the Station proper and about fifteen hundred feet north of the Lighthouse. A plank walk led one past the Warner home and on to the lookout. Several steep steps extended to a landing, then up some more to a trap door. This was raised and entry was made into a cozy little 7' x 7' room. The enclosed portion had windows on all four sides, with a door opening on the west side. A deck completely surrounded the lookout proper, with a double iron railing on all four sides. Near the phone a small writing board containing the steamer log was located. Binoculars and a long telescope were secured within easy reach, and a barometer hung on the wall.

On the west wall, above the phone, was located an alarm button that activated a large gong in the Station hallway and was used for emergency use only. A medium sized wood burning stove stood in the SE corner of the lookout and was surrounded by a metal shield to prevent the varnished wainscoting from blistering when we had a hot

stove on cold, windy days. One felt secure in his well equipped little enclosure. On fair weather days one could pace the outer deck, and aside from standing a good watch it afforded the watchman some exercise.

A Newman clock containing a 24-hour dial hung on the wall and had to be marked every half-hour with a numbered key. The dial was changed each day at 4 p.m. A perfect dial showing a mark every half-hour was evidence that a good watch had been stood for 24 hours. When a half-hour punch was missing, someone was in trouble.

It was a very nice morning, weather wise, on the 29th of December 1926. The sky was overcast with a light cloud cover. The visibility was excellent. A few inches of snow covered the ground and a little rim of ice along the shoreline was the extent of ice in Lake Michigan. It was a chilly twenty degrees and calm.

I poked up the fire and added another chunk of maple wood. A puff of blue smoke emerged from the open stove. It was wispy and fragrant. I always enjoyed the smell of wood smoke. Our lookout windows were divided and the sliding type. I shoved the north one open and leaned over the wainscoting with the stove warmth on my back and the bracing air on my face. To the northward lay South Manitou Bay, a great sweeping arc of shoreline that terminated at a low lying point which I later learned was called North Point. The Bay offered shelter from every wind but a Nor'easter. Conifers rimmed the entire bay. It was a beautiful sight.

Westward one saw the buildings that comprised the little settlement on the point. The Coast Guard station buildings, the dwellings, the post office and store were all bunched together and stood out sharply against the pine covered background. Running due west through the woods was a road called the State Road.

Looking southward was perhaps the prettiest sight. Rising there on the SE point of the Island was the

immaculate South Island Light. Pure white she stood, topped by her beautiful lens enclosure which was circled by a chest high black iron railing. It was a marvelous structure to see; tall and graceful and holding her head over a hundred feet above Lake Michigan.

Below the Light stood the fog signal building with two tall smokestacks emerging from the roof. North of the signal building lay the long rows of snow topped wood, cut in four foot lengths and used to fire the boilers when steam was needed to sound the big whistle. The Light Keeper's dwelling stood to the west on a hill and was connected to the Lighthouse by a long enclosed hallway.

A plank walk ran southward from the Coast Guard Station, past the store and post office, and on to the Light. Looking past the Light one saw the great expanse of Lake Michigan with the mainshore ribboning off towards Point Betsie.

The mainshore lay eastward. A great panorama of lands stretching from Point Betsie to Cat Head Point. The Sleeping Bear Dunes and Pyramid Point were visible against the gray sky. What a wonderful sight it would be, I thought, with the sun shining.

I have described briefly what I saw that morning watch in the lookout, but within me was a great desire to see all of the Island and meet the people who lived there. I looked forward to that with great eagerness.

I was relieved from lookout duty at eleven o'clock and returned to the Station. There I was sworn in, pledging allegiance to all that the Coast Guard stood for and to the United States flag. Captain Fisher read the oath and I repeated it after him while holding my hand on the Bible. That was the final act and I became a Surfman at South Manitou Island Coast Guard Station. It was hard for me to believe that a week earlier I was painting signs in Muskegon, Michigan. The thought overwhelmed me!

***

The Point and Its People

Jim Burdick was Keeper of South Island Light in 1926. He had held that position since 1908. His assistants were John Tobin and Ray Robinette. They all did a magnificent job and the light and fog signal building were always in tip-top condition. Jim's wife, Lillian, was Postmistress and besides her Post Office duties, tended the little store. The Post Office and the store was the first building north of the Light. It stood on the west side of the little plank walk.

Mail days were happy days. We all looked forward to letters from home, friends and sweethearts. Many times we gathered at the Post Office at mail time and waited for Lillian to sort the letters.

Living in the homes and the Coast Guard Station the winter of 1926 were the Burdicks, the Tobins, the Robinettes, the Barretts, the Warners, the Mackeys, Ben Johnson, Bertha Peth, the Fursts, the Fishers, the school teacher, Valerie Ames, and the Coast Guard crew. It was a real cozy little village.

Our boathouse was sturdily constructed and housed our power lifeboat, the pulling surfboat and the two beach carts. Both boats rested on rail carriages and were easily launched by rolling them down the track, which led to the Bay. East of the boathouse stood the workshop. Tools and gear were stored there and it also contained the paint locker. Adjacent to the workshop stood the Lighthouse boathouse. Their powerboat was sheltered there during the winter months and buoyed in the bay the remaining months of the year. South of the workshop stood the pump house. A four man pump, the hose cart and hose was stationed there. Back of the Station were two buildings. One was a woodshed where all the split wood was stored. The other one was used as a wash room. Kerosene for lamp and lantern use was also

stored there. Another small room was used for our gun locker, our 45's and 38's. Ben Johnson's fish shanty and icehouse was north of his house and on the bay. His beloved fish tug "Swallow" was shored up beside the fish shanty during the winter and buoyed in the bay during the fishing season.

Each dwelling, including the Coast Guard Station, had a small building out back with a path or walk leading to it. They were small structures where one could close the door and enjoy complete privacy. We had two at the Station. They were painted white and adorned with latticework, which enhanced the privacy!

These few paragraphs describe briefly the buildings, the homes and those who lived on the Point in December 1926. All the homes are now vacant or occupied only during the summer months by other people. Of the friends who made their homes there, few are left. Winter winds now sweep around the vacant, darkened houses, where lamplight once glowed through friendly panes. The big lighthouse doesn't light up the Point with its moon glow anymore and memories are all that remain for those still living who made their homes there.

***

My First Hike

The weather changed with the advent of January. Lake Michigan's water was getting colder each day. We had considerable wind and ice banks were forming along the shore. Since my arrival on the Island the snow had accumulated to 8 or 10 inches. Winter weather was creeping up on us.

Beach patrols ended on January 1st. Navigation was closed to all freighters except the carferries. Occasionally we sighted smoke from a northbound Ann Arbor Ferry. Cap Anderson was fishing hooks out of Frankfort and his tug was seen a few times. Lake Michigan for the most part was void of all traffic. The weather moderated considerably during mid- January and I had a desire to go hiking. I asked Cap Fisher for permission to go and he granted it. "Better stay on the beach," he cautioned, "because there's lots of woods away from the beach and you could get turned around." I thanked him for the advice and after dressing warmly started out.

I decided to head south past the Light. The beach was frozen and blown clear of most of the snow. The sun was bright, the air crisp and clean and everything was just right for a long hike. I walked a good fast gait for about an hour. The slopes on the southwest side of the Island began to rise. Here and there I noticed clumps of conifers clinging to the steep sides of the bluffs. Upon reaching the west side I found the gravel and clay sloping up the bluffs to a three or four hundred foot height. They appeared silent and majestic in the lowering sunlight. They were mostly clear of snow and frozen hard. I sized them up for several minutes and then decided to climb. Now if you have never tried to climb a bluff composed of clay and gravel, frozen hard and rough and about three hundred feet high, try it sometime! I

did and found the going mighty tough. After much scratching and crawling I finally reached the top.

There was a beautiful view awaiting me after my climb. I think it took me a good half-hour before I reached the rim. Before me lay the big lake, stretching out for miles and sparkling in the bright January sun. Eastward lay a wide snow covered plateau and beyond that the woodlands. The sun was lowering in the southwest when I reached the eastern edge of the bluff, where I could look down into the woods. I had two choices. I could backtrack and climb back down that rough frozen slope to the beach or hike back through the woods. Slipping and sliding down that big bluff didn't appeal to my better judgment, so I decided to take off through the timber. I could see the top of the Light from where I stood. I took a range on it and started down. The snow was much deeper as I descended the east slope, and the woods was thicker than I figured it would be when I reached the bottom. Twilight was beginning to settle over the Island. It was now going on six o'clock. I sighted ahead several hundred feet to a big tree and hiked straight to it. Then looking backwards at my tracks to keep my trail straight, I lined up another big tree and continued my course eastward. Darkness was creeping up fast now and it was becoming difficult to see my back tracks.

I knew Lake Florence ran north and south and if I could hit it I would be O.K. Soon it was dark, but with snow on the ground visibility in the woods was fairly good. I kept going and hoped my course was still eastward. Cap Fisher's warning, "There's lots of woodlands on South Island." proved to be more truth than poetry!

Then I waded out of a thick spread of hardwood and there before me lay the snow covered lake. I may have wandered a little, but I hit it. Ben Johnson's gang was cutting ice on Lake Florence, so all I had to do was find where they were cutting and the rest would be easy. Which way to go

around the lake was the problem. Lake Florence was nearly a mile long. If I chose the wrong way I would have a long hike before me. I decided to turn north and it proved to be a good guess, because they were getting their ice out of the north end. I circled the lake and there was the road. They had been hauling ice that day and I knew the sleigh tracks would lead me back to the Station. Ben's icehouse was just west of our boathouse.

Now everything was just right and I made good time the rest of the way to the Point. I entered the Station somewhat after seven-thirty that evening and found the crew concerned for my safety. They were about ready to start searching for me. The big question in their minds was where to look!

It was a good hike for me, however, and I felt like Daniel Boone on the way back through the dark, uncharted woods. Needless to say, I slept well that night after my first Island exploration.

***

The Night Wind

It is past midnight and the point lies quietly beneath the radiant soft glow of the Light. The only sounds that mar the solitude of the deep night are the lisping swells that meet the shoreline with quiet rhythm.

The waning moon, now only a crescent, steers her course westward through fleecy gray clouds and sheds barely enough light to outline our curving bay.

To the northward, as I circled the deck of our lookout, I could see the pinpoint glow of North Island's flashing red and white light. The Light Ship on the shoal, lying quietly on the calm lake, sends forth a steady beam from her masthead.

I entered the lookout, marked the dial in our Newman clock and rang up a sharp two bells. Perhaps a crewman who had the four to eight watch heard that ringing sound and mused sleepily, "I've got another three hours in the sack."

I was leaning on the Lookout railing, watching a steamer's lights twinkling as she steamed up the Passage, when the night wind started to enhance the beauty of the night with its fragrant breath. It came in from the northwest, carrying with it the aroma of the woodlands and the faint, damp smell of the lake. Soon the poplar leaves began to flutter unseen in that velvet darkness, but I could hear them. How sweet was the air! What a joy it was to breathe! The whole night seemed to change with the advent of the night wind. It appeared to foretell that the beauty of the night was soon to end. The night wind had awakened the woodlands, set the leaves to dancing and sent small wavelets shoreward.

My lookout watch would soon be over, and I looked forward to my beach patrol. There on that beautiful sandy shore I could walk into the early dawn, when the first faint streaks of light appeared over Pyramid Point.

Then the gulls would start soaring over the lake, crying their lonesome song. It was always so beautiful, and created that way by the night wind, which had gently awakened the Island and softly pushed the night westward with the waning moon beams.

***

A Summer Storm

The storm was approaching the island when I relieved Al at midnight. Lightning was silhouetting the pine trees behind the light and thunder was mumbling softly, far to the south. It was calm with only a wisp of air from the east. It's often that way before a hard storm. When it was ready to hit us, the wind would veer sharply to the southwest and come swirling in, pushing vivid lightning and great salvos of crashing thunder before it. Before Al departed from the lookout he remarked that I probably would be windblown and wet on my south patrol at 2 a.m.

Harry Tobin relieved me just before two o'clock. The light breeze had freshened a bit, but was still easterly. "You're going to get it good." Harry said, as he lit up his pipe, "I thought it would hit me before I finished my patrol. It's holding off longer than I thought it would."

"I'm sure you're quite right, Harry." I said as I raised the trap door and prepared to leave. "If it gets too hot up here, make a run for the station."

"That I'll do and you can bet on it." he replied.

I scrambled down the steep stairway and hustled toward the station. After swiping a hunk of cake that Crain had stowed away behind a plate in the cupboard, I rigged up in my rain gear, hip boots and sou'wester. Then I slung the Newman clock and Coston signals under my rain jacket before leaving the station and heading down the plank walk towards the light.

Before I reached the store the wind hauled into the southwest and came in strong. Great shafts of lightning slashed through the dark sky and were followed seconds later by crashes of thunder that jarred the earth. "This," I thought, "is going to be a dandy!"

My lantern blew out before I reached the Light. I stowed it alongside the fog signal building and hit the beach.

I had experienced many storms while on patrol, but this one as I braced into it, seemed to be more violent than any of the others. The sea picked up rapidly and I was glad I wore my boots because the seas were half way to my knees at times. I sought higher ground, away from the surges, but the hiking was more difficult in the soft sand.

Then the rain came down in buckets full and was driven almost horizontally before the wind. It came in under my sou'wester and ran down my neck. It was most uncomfortable, to say the least! Lightning rent the sky almost constantly and the thunder crashed continuously.

As I rounded the first point the wind seemed to increase in intensity. Some of the stronger gusts picked up the wet sand and whipped it into my face and hands with such force that I had to turn my back to windward. "Man dear!" I thought, "What a storm!" I yearned for my warm, dry bunk where I could lay and listen to the wind howl and hear the gale driven rain pelt the windowpanes!

Then it happened! I was sloshing along, high on the beach near the steep bank, topped with large trees, when a tremendous burst of lightning exploded all around me. The ensuing crash of thunder deafened me, and before I knew anything, I was knee deep in the surf and heading towards Sleeping Bear Point. Believe me, I was scared stiff!

After collecting my senses, I continued towards the key post, hoping fervently that I wouldn't encounter another lightning blast like the one that had stunned me.

The key post was finally reached. I marked the dial in the Newman clock and started back towards the station. The storm had abated somewhat and was pushing towards North Island. The wind and the stinging sand went along with it.

Upon reaching the station, I found Harry in the crew's quarters. When the sparks had begun to fly out of the mouthpiece of the lookout phone, as it often did during

severe electrical storms, he had run for the shelter of the station.

He greeted me with, "Where were you when lightning struck, back of the Light?"

"Back of the Light?" I replied, "You must be kidding! That struck near me – hit a tree or something and it wasn't back of the Light either. I was down the beach at least a mile and a half from here." Harry couldn't believe that. "I'll find out tomorrow." I said, "I'm hiking down there just to find out what did happen."

After calling the next watch we turned in. How good it felt to slide under those warm, dry sheets! Lightning was still illuminating the sky over North Island and the thunder was just a distant rumble as I fell asleep.

The next afternoon I hiked down to find out, if I could, where the lightning had struck the night before. I took the old path that led through the woods next to the beach. I reached the old Haas place and crossed the clearing. The old apple trees were all intact. It hadn't struck there. The path then led through a stand of large beech trees, and it was among them that I found out what happened.

A huge beech, four feet or more in diameter lay in shreds all over the woods. Forty sticks of dynamite couldn't have wrought more havoc! Pieces of wood and shattered limbs lay everywhere. Some were lying fifty to sixty feet away from what remained of the riven trunk. The big tree had stood not more than a hundred feet from the beach. I remained there for several minutes, pondering the might of that one tremendous lightning bolt that had destroyed that big tree in seconds, and just about frightened the life out of me!

***

The Cat Call

I am not sure who brought the catcall home to South Island. It could have been Al, Van or Crain. And I don't know where they found it, but it was a good one. When sounded, it closely resembled the long wail of a cat in distress. In fact it was too realistic! Whoever brought it back was no doubt prompted by a prior incident.

Before I get into the tale of "Our Cat Call" I'll relate briefly the story about the real cat which, without a doubt, started the whole fracas.

Somehow – no one could remember when – a cat gained entrance to the crew's quarters. Later on that night the cat became panicky, perhaps because it was confined. Maybe it was a victim of a psychosis. At any rate it became wild and began to emit great howling cries. Of course, that awakened the crew who was sacked out and also the Old Man.

Down the stairs they came and found the cat scampering around the mess room like a wild Jay Hawk. The mess room door was left open and a man was stationed by the stairway to prevent the cat from heading for the rooms upstairs. Several of the fellows tried to corner the wild feline, which was now careening around the mess room yowling its head off. Mackey, attired in socks, long underwear and shirt, stood on a chair wielding a broom with great vigor. Several times he connected with the cat, causing it to howl the louder and race with increased tempo around the room.

Finally, after a great deal of confusion and a few choice cuss words by the crew, the cat bolted for the door. It turned into the hallway, and then raced out the back door and into the night. Peace was again restored, and the crew and the Old Man again turned in, hoping that the obnoxious cat had headed for North Point!

Well, that's how it all started.

About a week later, late at night, the silence was broken by a tremendous, wailing scream of a cat. There were a few moments of silence and then another blast from our cat call echoed throughout the upstairs rooms. I think I knew who manipulated the cat call, probably Van or Al, but what happened a few moments later was what really counted. Suddenly the door across the hall opened and out came the Old Man wearing his short nightgown and slippers. He snatched the hallway lantern off its hook and started down the stairs. When he reached the foot of the stairs, no cat was to be found. Then into the hall and out the door he hurried. Now the night was cold and it would have been a hilarious sight to have seen the Old Man, clad in his short night gown, parading around the Station searching for that cat. Needless to mention, there was muffled laughter in the crew's sleeping quarters. The Old Man returned to his bedroom somewhat chilled and perturbed. The cat call was judiciously silenced the rest of the night. I could not resist an inward feeling that the Old Man had a sneaking suspicion that the cat call, which had awakened him, was a bit artificial. A few nights later his suspicions became a reality.

That night I had the eight to midnight watch and was on lookout duty when Mackey relieved me. I had noticed the lamp was burning brightly in the crew's quarters as Mac approached the lookout. When Mac entered through the trap door, I said, "You forgot to dim the crew's quarters light, Mac."

"No I didn't." Mac replied, "The whole gang and the Old Man are waiting for you. There's hell to pay and the Old Man is plenty sore. He has caught on to the cat call. You had better get down there."

Upon arriving at the Station, I found six members of the crew lined up in the chairs alongside the north windows and the Old Man sitting in his chair by the round table,

wearing his night robe. His pipe was fired up and so was his disposition! His only words were, "Find a seat, Crowner."

The cat call had again sent out its mournful howl into the night. The Old Man was now convinced that a crewman had to be guilty, so he sounded the alarm gong and the entire crew had bolted from their bunks, thinking the Station was afire or a ship aground. That gong never sounded unless an emergency awaited them.

After I was seated the Old Man just sat quietly in his chair, blowing clouds of smoke towards the big hanging lamp. Finally, he cut loose!

"I don't know who has that damn cat call or whatever it is, but I've had enough of it! Now listen carefully to what I'm going to tell you. And I mean every word of it. If that thing ever sounds again, you're all going to be damn sorry. We're going to launch the pulling boat and go for a nice long ride over to the North Island Light and back. You're all going to be pulling on those twelve foot oars, and I'm going to be handling the sweep and laughing like hell! Now let that sink into your heads."

Then he arose from his chair, knocked out his pipe with a great clanging noise on the cuspidor and strode out of the room. A few smiles were noted after the Old Man left and a few murmurings among the crew. Then someone said, "It was sure fun with the cat call while it lasted, but I'm sure as hell the Old Man meant what he said."

That was the end of the cat call. I never did find out what became of it. It was probably heaved off the end of the Station dock into fifty feet of water.

***

Bull Sessions in the Crew's Quarters

Memory takes me back many times to the crew's quarters at the South Island Station and the bull sessions we enjoyed there. The crew's quarters served as our lounging room. A round oak table stood by the east window with a big oil lamp suspended over it. Near the table was a wall bookcase full of books that were seldom read. In the SE corner stood the little stand that harbored our "Monkey Ward" record player and the pile of records that were so often played. The big wood-burner occupied a space near the south wall, near the door that led to the mess room. On the west side, a door led to the hallway. Rows of hooks also lined the west wall, where one could hang up coats and caps. Six or eight chairs were lined up under the double window on the north wall that faced the bay and North Point.

The fall and winter months, when the wood-burner was going full blast, were the best months for yarns and tall stories. Mackey was one of our best yarn spinners. When he neared the climax of his story, he often placed his hands on his knees and squinted his eyes. Some of his stories were good enough to bring the house down! Cliff was never very expressive, but a good yarn would cause him to cut loose with that high pitched "huh-huh" laugh of his which often highlighted the story. Barrett could tell the wild tales. When he got wound up, there was no end to them. I used to think he imagined some of them, but they were interesting, in spite of being left-handed at times. Ben Johnson frequently joined us on winter afternoons and his Norwegian brogue enhanced his seagoing stories. Sunday afternoons were usually fun days because quite often the Becks, the Hutzlers, or Uncle Bill Haas paid us a visit.

There were times when a couple of crew members would choose a Sunday afternoon to sit in the mess room at the big oak table and write letters. Sometimes it was a

difficult task to concentrate on the letters, however, because great bursts of laughter would often erupt from the gang in the crew's quarters. Then we would think twice before writing the next sentence!

Ralph Thompson was an avid partaker of Copenhagen "snoose." Many times in the midst of a tale he would raise his hand in a time out signal and with chin high, approach the cuspidor. If his story was long, he often called time out twice!

Those were great days – days of fellowship and laughter that broke up the monotony of long winter months.

***

I Remember the M.H. Stuart

The Stuart was a small steamer, with pilothouse, crew's quarters and engine aft. She was sighted many times in the passage, steaming merrily along to her destination. Captain Anderson, whose family moved off the Island in 1926, was her owner and skipper.

Several times, while I was stationed at South Island, the Stuart entered our harbor and paid us a visit. Captain Anderson enjoyed visiting with his old friend, Ben Johnson. I remember one time in particular, when the Stuart entered the bay loaded with cement, en route to a west shore harbor. She was loaded heavily, with the water awash on her main deck!

A quick squall or any kind of rough weather would have put the Stuart in a precarious position, but Cap Anderson said he watched the weather closely. Even so, squalls formed quickly during summer months, and I am inclined to believe that the Stuart may have been hit by a few, but survived due to Cap Anderson's skill as a skipper. He knew and understood every move of that little steamer and nothing excels experience, when a skipper runs into foul weather.

***

South Island Light

Gone are her glory days
When her bright beam
Guided sail and steam,
Through the Passage.

Gone are her Keepers
Who faithfully kept
Her light shining bright,
Through all the seasons.

The fog still creeps in
As in other years,
And blots out the stars
And her lightless form.

Then we, who remember,
Can still hear the sound
Of that measured blast,
From the Fog Signal Station.

Launching the *Swallow*
Ben Johnson's Fish Tug

The Swallow was Ben Johnson's pride and joy. She was a staunch craft, around 30-foot in length and framed up heavily with prime oak. Her planking was heavy, too, being an inch and a half in thickness from stem to stern. She would have been a good icebreaker, but Ben never used her for those tasks. She was always pulled high and dry before winter struck the Manitous. Planks and rollers, heavy tackle and a strong Coast Guard and Lighthouse crew helped Ben pull her out each fall. The launching, each spring, was an easier task, but again help was needed by the C.G. and Lighthouse crews.

Ben was always grateful for all the manpower provided by those able crews, and during his fishing season provided us with ample supplies of those good Lake Michigan fish.

Each spring, usually in April after the ice masses had melted into the chill waters of the bay, was launching time for the Swallow. Planking was re-laid to the water's edge and again the heavy tackle and manpower was on hand to ease the Swallow back into the bay waters. Heavy shoring timbers had to be moved along the Swallow's sides to prevent her from listing, and the rollers had to be moved from forward to aft positions as she moved slowly to the water's edge.

After the Swallow length was a good third or more into the lake, with her stern buoyed in four or five feet of water, it was time to cut her loose and let her slide into those cold bay waters. A thirty-foot line was always attached to her bow and manned by two crew members who could pull her alongside of Ben's dock after she was fully launched.

On this particular day, for some unknown reason, no one manned that bowline, and the Swallow was sliding gracefully into the bay with the bowline trailing in the lake. I

was on the dock. Something had to be done quickly, so without any thought of the consequences, I leaped off the dock, hip boots and all, into over three feet of ice-cold water and seized that bow line. I dug my boot heels into the gravel and slowly stopped the Swallow.

I was standing in four feet of water. My hip boots were full and my legs getting numb when I reached the dock and was pulled out by the crew. I headed for the Station without draining my boots. All I could think of was getting into the Station and near the warmth of that kitchen range. I made it O.K., but it was a long 600-foot run that day. How good it felt when I got thawed out and into some dry clothes. My boots were a long while drying out.

It was a hilarious experience for me that cold April day when we launched Ben's Swallow. But once again Ben was happy with his boat moored safely at his dock. Now he could start setting gill nets again.

***

A Crossing to Glen Haven

It was a cloudy cold morning in March. We needed some staples that weren't available on the Island. There was also a backlog of mail at the Post Office to go to the mainland and probably more important to us was the incoming mail waiting for us there.

So we decided to make an attempt with our power lifeboat. The bay was full of drift ice. It was jammed in – not frozen solid, but it did take us an hour to reach open water. The wind had freshened, but it was on our tail and we made good time before a light running sea. However, our luck changed as we approached the big dock at Glen Haven. There before us lay an expanse of floe ice that extended out and around the dock. It was wind-jammed in and tight. Getting through it was out of the question, so we headed towards Sleeping Bear Station, where there appeared to be a few openings in the floes. If we could reach the ice banks that formed along the shoreline perhaps we could scramble up and over them.

All went well until we were within a stone's throw of the ice banks. Then we hit a long heavy floe. The bow of the lifeboat cleared the ice and settled into open water, but the stern raised enough to free our prop and there we hung with the prop fanning the air! We shut her down, broke out the pike poles and after fifteen minutes of hard "poling" we cleared away enough ice to enable the stern to settle and get the prop back into the water. Then we proceeded to the ice banks.

Sleeping Bear crewmen helped three of us up and over the ice ridge and we headed for the Post Office at Day's store to get our supplies and mail. I don't remember who carried the bag with the outgoing mail, but it reached the store O.K. We obtained our supplies and mail and returned to our boat as soon as possible, because it was

getting late, and we had hoped to get back to South Island before darkness set in.

We boarded our lifeboat after lowering our supplies and mail, thanks to the Sleeping Bear Crew's help. We were lucky we didn't get a cold bath by falling into the ice floes.

The trip back to South Island was uneventful. We made good time through open water in the channel and didn't encounter too much trouble with ice in the bay. After pulling our lifeboat into the boathouse and delivering the mail, we headed for the Station and it felt mighty good to get warm again.

Perhaps a few of us wondered if that trip through the ice and the cold wind was really necessary!

***

George Hutzler's Raspberries

It was a typical late winter Sunday afternoon at South Manitou. Several crewmembers were enjoying the warmth of the crew's quarters. Our little phonograph was cooling off after a record playing session. Crain was writing letters on the mess room table, a few were reading and the rest of us just taking it easy. Someone mentioned the ice in the bay and wondered when the SW wind would come along and blow it up the passage.

Around three o'clock George and Louis Hutzler dropped in to say hello and visit awhile. They had journeyed down to get their mail, and we were glad they stopped to see us before returning to the farm.

We talked about the weather and wondered if we would enjoy an early spring. George and Lou hoped we would, because they had a lot of plowing awaiting them. The conversation shifted around and someone mentioned the fruit, wondering if the extreme cold in January had harmed it. George said he didn't think it had, but hoped his raspberries would be plentiful, come July.

I told George that red raspberries were my favorite fruit and could never get enough of them.

"Well, Crowner," George said, "Lou and I will have to have you up for supper some night when the berries are on."

"Thanks George," I replied, "nothing could please me more. I'll surely look forward to that treat."

Spring was welcome that year. The ice, which had plagued us several times, melted back into the big lake. The sea gulls were scouting North Point and preparing to nest there, and our wooded island had shed its blanket of snow before the warming south winds. Spring was such a wonderful time at South Manitou.

July finally arrived with its warm days and ample rainfall. I was enjoying one of my frequent island hikes on a warm July day when I met George, who was heading for the point.

"Hi, Crowner, how are things with you?" he asked.

"Fine George," I replied, "and I hope it's the same with you."

"Everything is growing good," he added, "and by the way Crowner, the raspberries are coming along nicely. Should be ripe in another ten days or so. Can you make it up about then?"

"It will take a lot to stop me, George," I replied. "How about a week from Tuesday?"

"That'll be about right. Lou and I will be expecting you."

My date with George and Lou happened to fall on one of my days off at the Station. Late that afternoon I headed up the beach to the big dock and then west to the Hutzler farm. I arrived there just as George and Lou were coming in from the field. They both greeted me and we entered the house after George put the team in the barn.

"Now," said George, "we'll have a glass of beer before I tend to the chores. This is Lou's turn to get supper."

George and Lou made good beer and it hit the spot on that warm evening.

What a meal that was! I've forgotten part of the menu, but it included mashed potatoes, meat, vegetables and homemade bread. I hadn't enjoyed homemade bread since I left home. George and Lou kept urging me to have another helping of most everything on the table. I know I ate too much, but I was hungry after that three-mile hike to the farm, and I just couldn't resist Lou's cooking!

After finishing supper, we sat at the table and visited awhile. It was well for me too, because that wonderful meal had a chance to settle a bit.

"Now Lou," George said, "get some raspberries for Crowner."

Lou went to the kitchen and returned with a huge bowl of beautiful, large red raspberries and placed them in front of me, along with a pitcher of cream and the sugar bowl. How I did enjoy that bowl of luscious fruit! "George," I said, "those were by far the best raspberries I ever ate."

"Glad you enjoyed them, Crowner." Then, turning to Lou, he said, "Go fetch him another bowl."

"Wait a minute George!" I managed to say. "Man alive, I'm full and I think I'll founder on another bowl."

"Get him another one, Lou; same size." Lou returned with the second bowl and it was heaping, like the first!

I managed somehow to finish that second serving, but wondered if I'd ever be able to make it back to the Station. After I had downed the last spoonful of those big red berries, I could hardly breathe!

"Now," said George, "don't ever let me hear you say that you never had enough raspberries."

"Never, George, will I ever say that again." I answered, and both he and Lou laughed.

It was growing dark and after thanking them for that meal of meals, the raspberries and a very pleasant evening, I left their home and started down the road to the Station. The brisk walk, down to the big dock and then up the beach, helped settle that sumptuous supper, which I'll never forget as long as I live. Thanks to George and Lou!

***

Fishing On Lake Florence

Ed Tobin and I both liked to fish. We had an ice shanty on the little lake and spent many happy hours there during the winter of '27. Our shanty wasn't fancy but it kept most of the wind out. We had a small wood burning stove in a corner near the door and after we got it fired up everything was cozy.

We most always carried along some potatoes to fry in our skillet atop the little stove. And if we were lucky enough to have a few fish our noon lunch was complete.

Invariably, Zip, Tobin's long legged hound dog, went with us. After lunch, if the fishing was slow, Ed and I would take a break and go rabbit hunting with Zip. Snowshoe rabbits were quite plentiful on the Island then. Zip had a good voice, but at times when the snowshoe ran an extra wide circle, we couldn't hear him.

Then Ed and I would stand and wait. Soon we would hear him coming and we would get ready with our guns. We always hoped that Zip wasn't too close to the speeding rabbit, because we didn't want to hit him! It was always great sport hunting with that long legged old hound. He was the best.

Then after hunting awhile, we would return to our fish shanty and catch a few more fish. It was always a good day when Ed and I could fish and hunt.

***

My Nine-Shot Revolver

In the spring of '27 I ran across an ad in the sporting magazine for a .22 caliber, H & R nine-shot revolver. I couldn't pass that up, thinking it would be a good companion on my around-the-Island hikes. So I ordered it.

It was a happy day for me when it finally arrived, four weeks later. I was waiting for our mail at the little post office when Lillian gave me the good news.

"Jerry," she said, "Here's that package you have waited for so long." I couldn't wait and opened it right there! It was a beauty with an octagon barrel nine inches long and a good sized checkered walnut grip. The barrel was deep blue and shining. I was very happy with it.

I had already ordered several boxes of ammunition. That was once when I bought the cart before the horse! And lest I forget – a leather holster was included in the package.

I can't recall how many times I took that gun with me when I went hiking or how many boxes of shells I fired, but they were many.

In 1927, Prohibition was in force and it was always easy to find empty whiskey bottles on the beach; bottles thrown overboard from Canadian vessels and yachts. Many people bought their "fire water" in Canada those days.

Those bottles made good targets when a light surf was running. I'd heave a bottle out into the lake and then fire away. I didn't score many hits, but it was a lot of fun.

I also owned a .22 rifle but it was a bit too cumbersome to lug along on long hikes. My 9-shooter was easier to take and was with me on most of my long hikes.

***

I Remember …

… the little $2.98 camera that I bought from Montgomery Wards. It was a box camera and took a No. 116, 12-exposure roll film. I took an album full of Island pictures with that little camera and what a joy it has been these long years later, to haul them out and relive those happy days at South Manitou.

A South Manitou Blow

A Nor'easter engulfs us and the storm flags crack and snap in the howling gale. A maelstrom boils on North Point's projecting reef and the lightship in the passage strains mightily on her mooring chain as she rides each coursing sea. Anchored in the bay, the Lenore bucks like a bronco and August is glad he put a new line on the mooring spar. The small poplars by the station sway crazily before the blast, and the pines behind the light bend their branches to leeward in the Nor'easter.

The guy wires on the lookout sing a song in the gale and I wonder if they'll hold! A window is open on the lee side and I lean on its frame and watch the turbulent waters. No steamers are in sight. They have long since sought shelter.

John has just entered the light's lower door and will make his spiral way topside to light up. Soon a great beam will be reflected through those beautiful prisms and a long shaft of light will reach out across the storm tossed lake.

I throw two chunks of beech in the wood burner and open the draft. Mackey is coming along on the plank walk to relieve my watch, and the wind blows him off several times before he reaches the lookout steps. I raise the trap door on the lookout floor to let him enter and a great blast of frigid air follows him through the opening, making the lantern flicker wildly and sending a shower of sparks out of the wood burner. One sentence from him, "Man, it's blowing!" I answer, "You know it." and then, "What's on for mess tonight?"

***

Our Telephones

There was a submerged telephone cable from Sleeping Bear Point to South Manitou. Then the wire was strung on poles to North Point (now called Seagull Point). From there it was submerged to North Manitou and then pole-wired to their lighthouse, the Coast Guard Station and the homes on North Island.

One of the crewmen on North Island played the mouth organ, and he played it beautifully. Quite often he would call me when I had the midnight-to-two watch and play songs for me. He could play just about everything in the book. Many times I would call Sleeping Bear lookout and he would call the operator at Maple City and all of us would enjoy his music, and carry on a four way conversation. I never got to know the operator at M.C., but she had a sweet voice and I always thought of her as being a pretty girl!

Several times our operator at M.C. would interrupt our music and conversations, and say, "Hold it boys, I have a call." Then, after her call was completed she would cut in, and say, "O.K. fellows let's have some more music." I think she enjoyed the music and visiting as much as we did. Surely it did shorten up the two-hour watch in our lookouts and those night hours were more pleasant for our operator at Maple City, too.

***

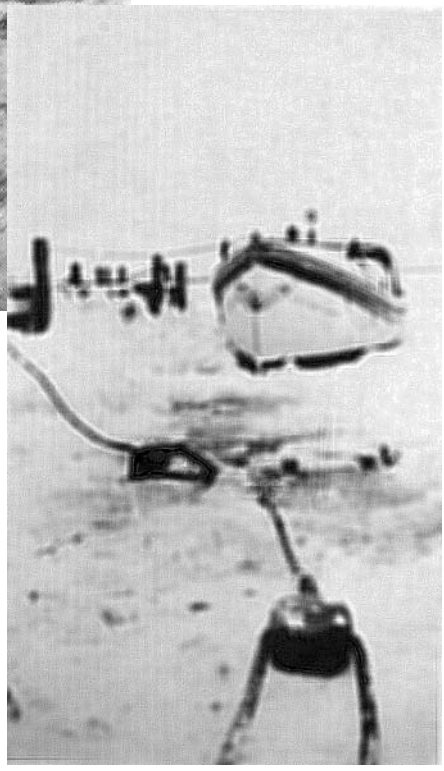
I Remember …

… the 4th of July nights in the Manitou Passage. In the 20's many of the big ore carriers used the passage, up-bound or down-bound. Many of them had a good supply of fireworks and after darkness settled over the lake they touched off their supply of sky rockets, Roman candles and star-burst rockets. What a beautiful display it was!

A few of our crewmembers touched off some "block busters," but that was about the extent of our celebration. I often wondered if crewmembers on the vessels could hear the report of our "bombs." I doubt it very much, because the steamer lanes lay a good four to five miles from the island.

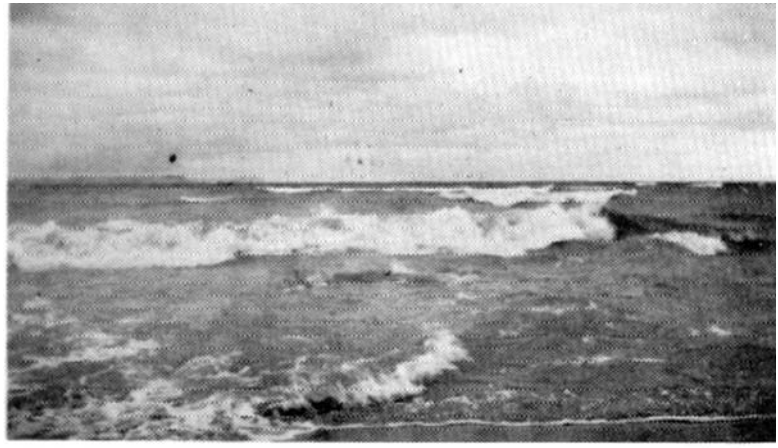
Photographs

My father liked to pitch horseshoes when he was at South Manitou



Our lifeboat in ice — just before we pulled her out.

Fog Signal Station from top of the Light. Note the huge pile of wood north of the Signal Station



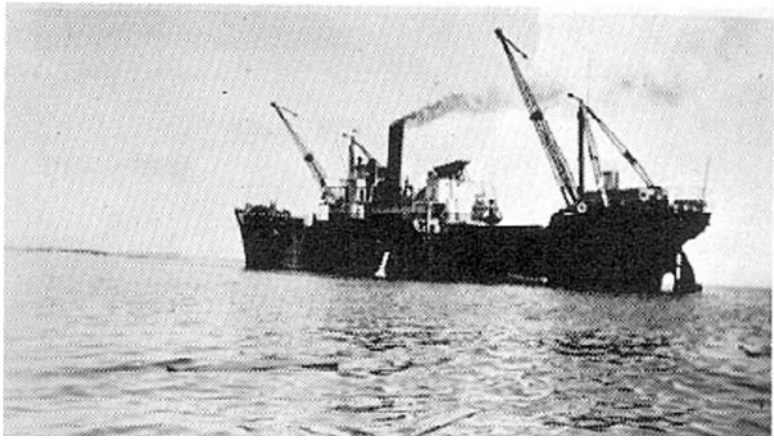
Surf in front of Fog Signal Station.

Winter view from the C.G. Lookout, looking NW

Crew members by the flag tower. L. to R. – Anderson, Crain, Deering, Looze, Johnson and Mackey.

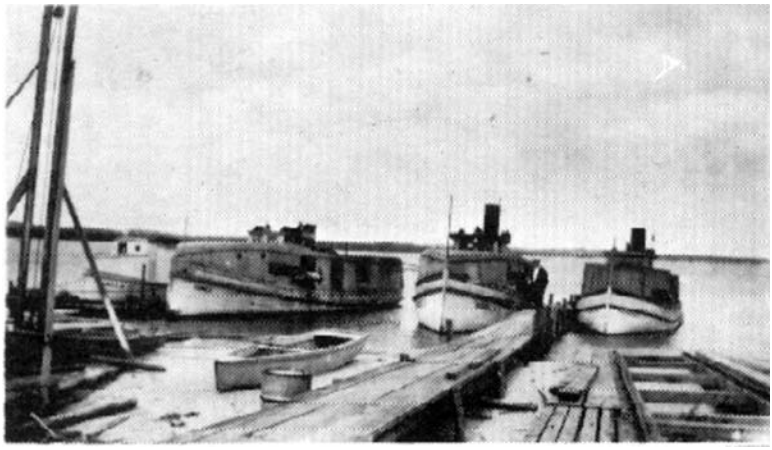
Mae Tobin — 1928

Bob and his mare Kate. Bob taught her to lie down.



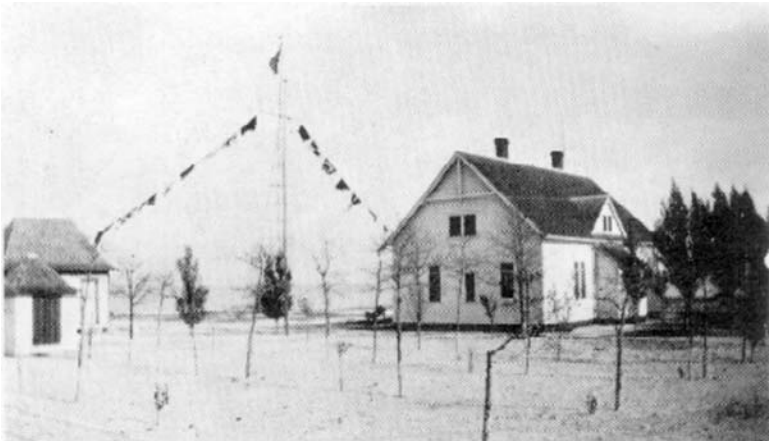
The *Fred W. Green's* first visit to South Manitou. Later she was painted gray.

Launching the *Swallow*. L. to R. – John Tobin, Mackey, Crowner, Ed Tobin, Cap. Fisher and Ernest Hutzler.



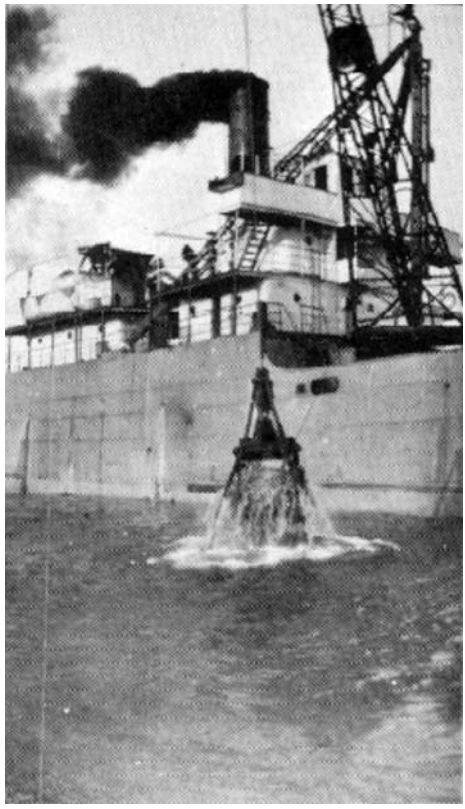
Frankfort Fish tugs lying weather at South Manitou Island

Rough water on North side of the Island

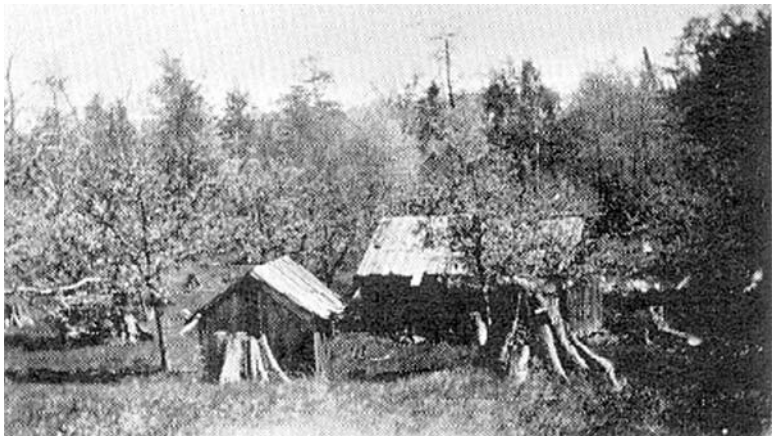


Looking NE towards the Coast Guard Station – 1927

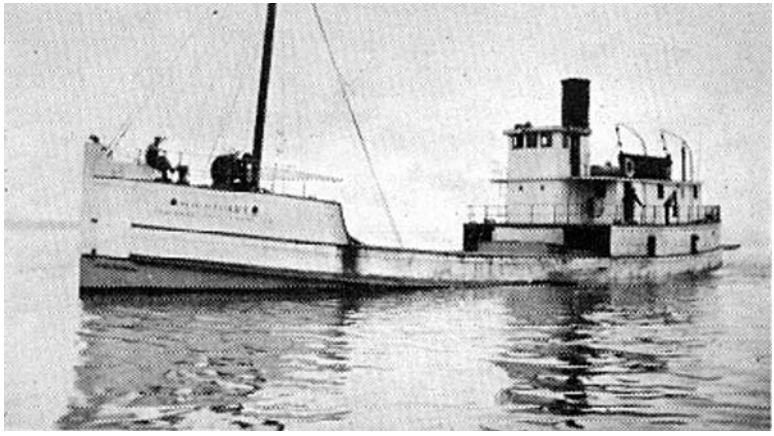
The crew stowing gear after a beach card drill.



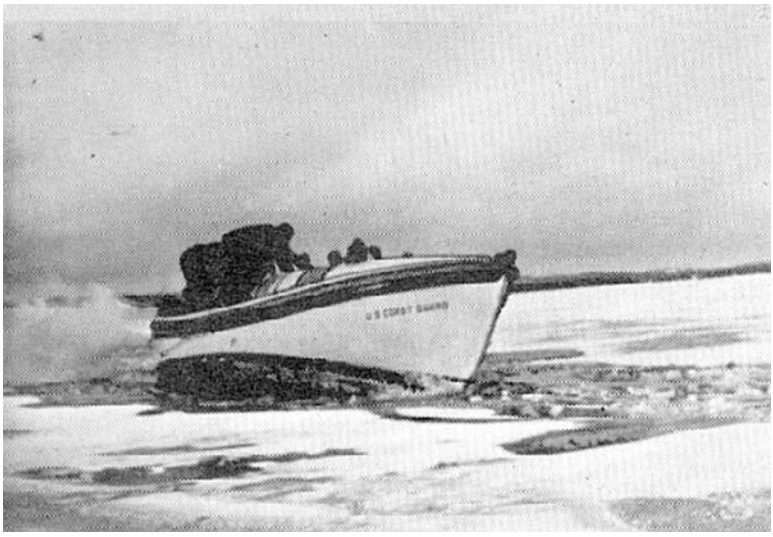
Str. *Fred W. Green* – Loading gravel in South Manitou Bay. The *Green* was only 70 ft. off the shore



The old Shank place on west side of Island.



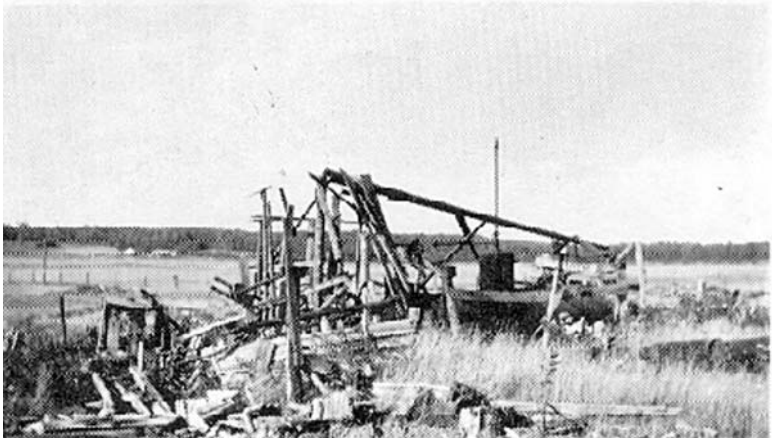
The *M.H. Stuart* entering South Manitou Harbor. She was heavily loaded - 1927



Lifeboat breaking ice to get out of bay – 1927

Clearing ice off the launchway after a winter NE gale.
L. to R. – Gould, Deering, Tobin, Looze and Johnson.

Surf and sand on the SW side of the Island.



Remains of the old lumber mill — south of cemetery.

Cutting up our winter's supply of wood. L. to R. – Johnson, Mackey, Crain, Crowner, Beck and Tobin.

The wood sawing job. L. to R. – Anderson, Beck and Crowner.

Buzz sawing up our winter's supply of firewood. L. to R. – Looze, Willy Beck, Crowner and Mackey. – 1927

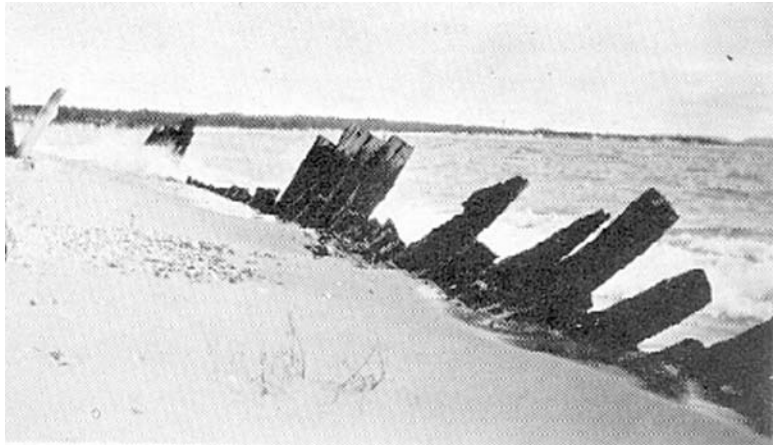
Splitting wood for kitchen ranges. L. to R. – Crain, Johnson and Looze.

The Launch! Notice the "Old Man" leaning forward to keep his balance. When the surfboat hit the water, it lost momentum fast.

Pulling surfboat drill, just after launching. L. to R. – Furst, Looze, Gould, Deering, Tobin, Cap. Fisher. Crowner back of Deering.

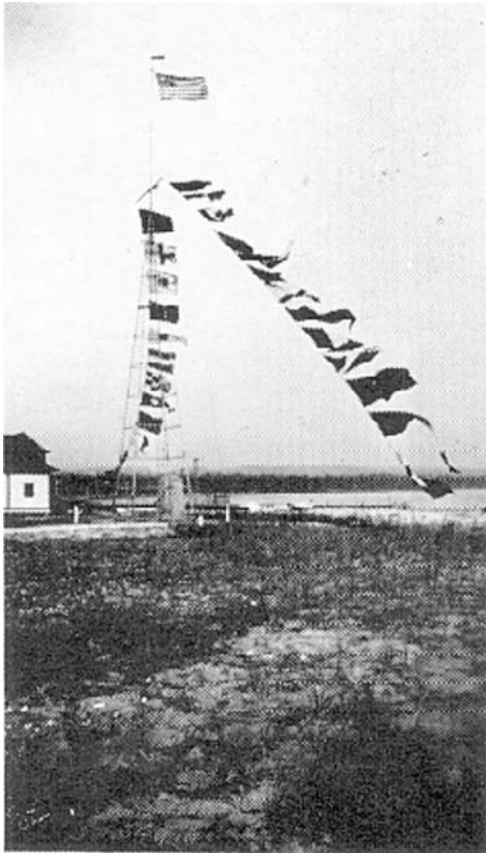
After the launch. Crew at "Oars". The next command from the "Old Man" would be "Give way together". Notice the beautiful sheer line of our surfboat. Crew L. to R. – Cap. Fisher, Tobin, Deering, Crowner, Looze, Gould, and Furst is in back of Gould.

"Give way together" from the "Old Man," and we pulled away towards the old *Liberty*, which was moored in the bay.



All that remained of the ***Lomie Burton*** in 1928.

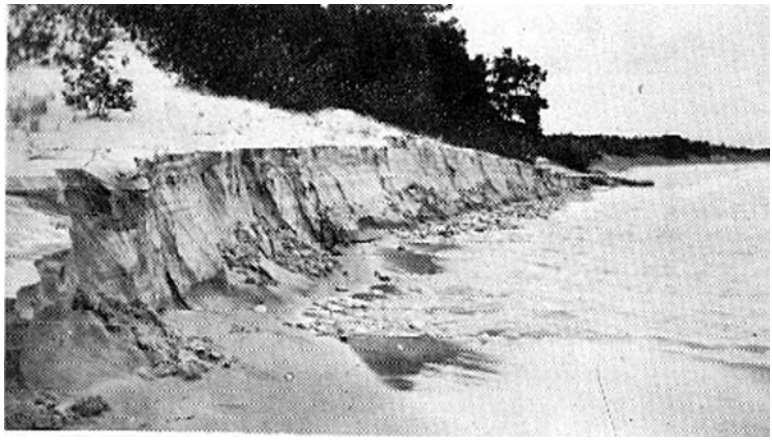
Nine-foot windrow of ice piled up on our beach by NE gale, making it impossible to launch our boats.



International code flags hoisted to honor the first Columbus Day – 1927

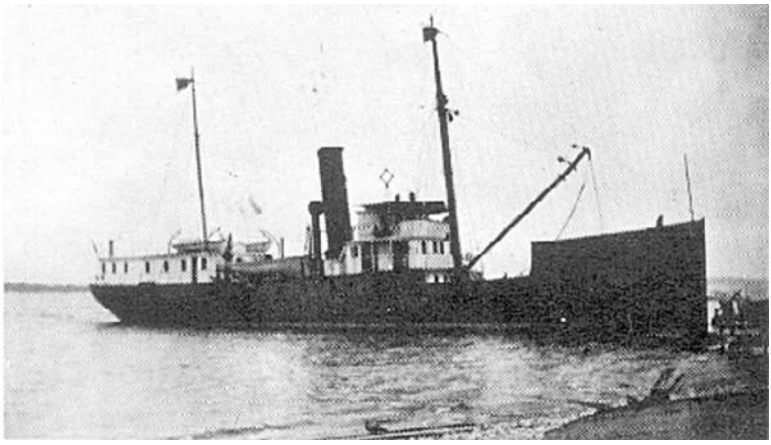
U.S. Coast Guard Station — 1927

Rolling out our pulling surfboat for boat drill. Only two crew members are visible. L. to R. – Norm Furst and Fred Looze.

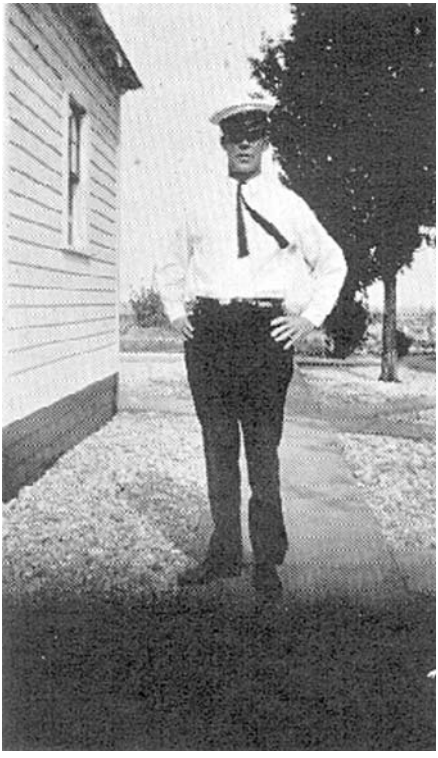


Beach erosion near Beck's farm, south side of Island.

The lighthouse tender *Sumac* at station dock with Lighthouse supplies.



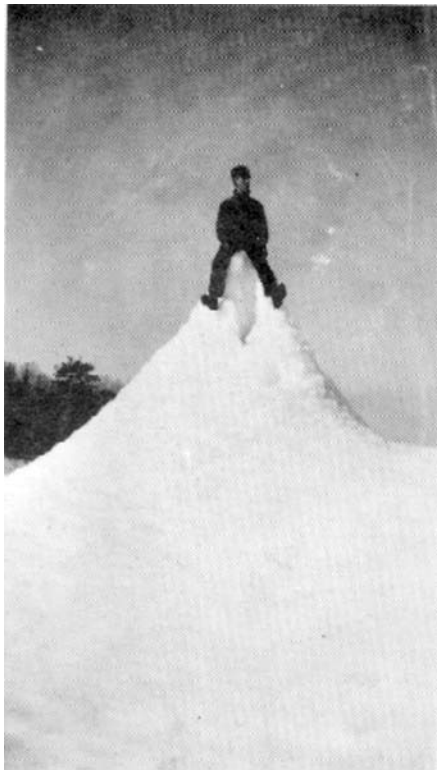
Lighthouse tender ***Sumac*** unloading supplies for South Island Light – 1927



Wm. Fisher, C.B.M. Officer in charge of South Manitou Station. 1924 -1928

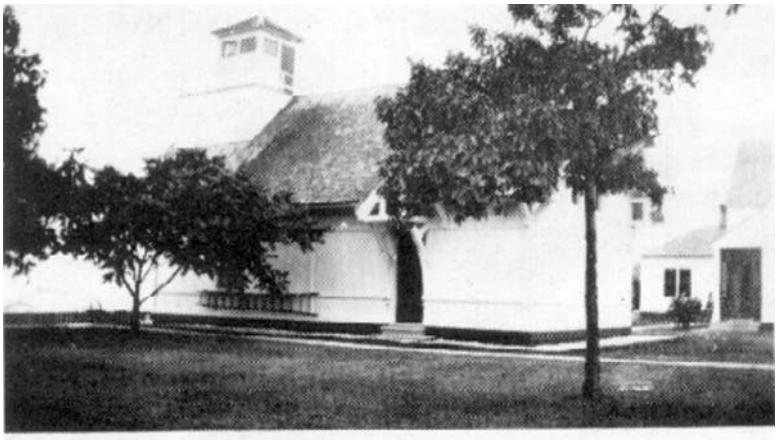
Ardene Fisher — 1928

Beverly Fisher



Clifford Deering atop an iceberg, near North Point - 1927

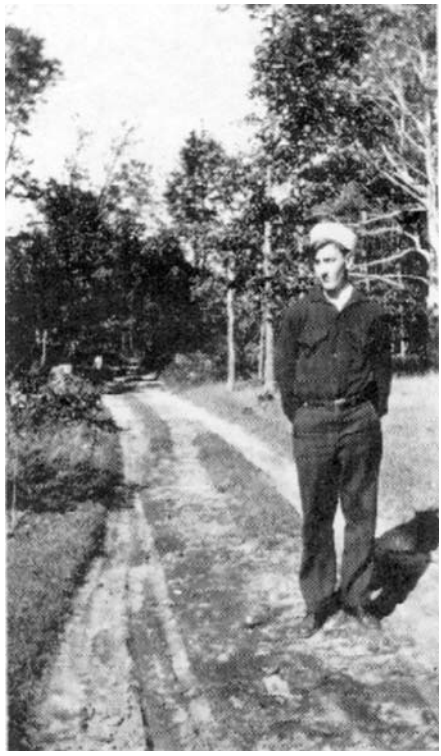
Looking NW from C.G. lookout. August Warner's house is foreground. Coast Guard buildings beyond.



North Manitou Island C.G. Station, boat house, and lookout

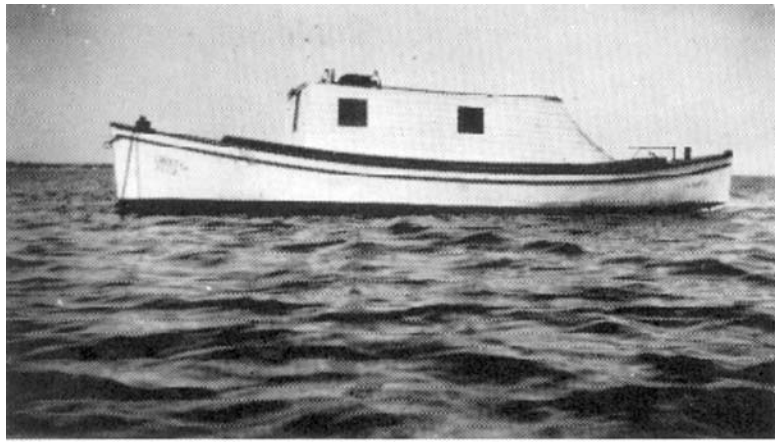
Bob Johnson

Crowner, petting "Zip" and Ed Tobin at our fish shanty on Lake Florence.

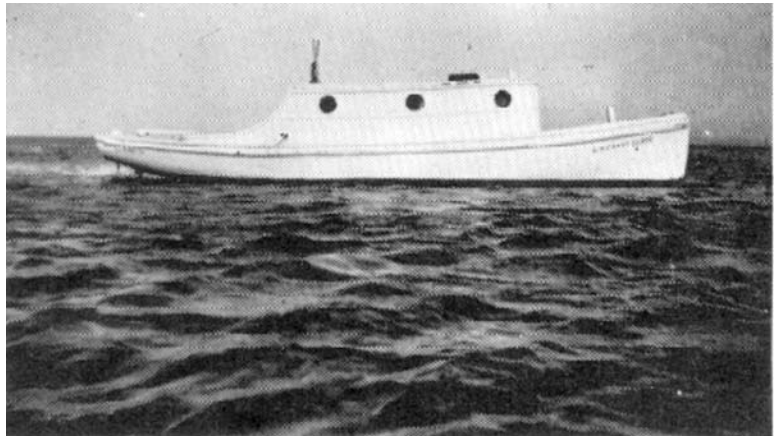


Lon Warner

North end of Lake Florence - 1927



The old *Liberty*, which belonged to the crew.



Our C.G. Supply Boat. Used for towing and getting supplies from Mainshore.

South Manitou Waves As I Remember Them

Waves are as much a part of South Manitou as the sunshine and the beautiful clouds, so I thought it proper to write a few words about them. They are much like people, all different, but composed of water instead of flesh and bones. They have character and moods. Some are gentle, some will fool you and the big ones are mean! Have you ever thought of them as having these traits?

Webster defines a wave as "a curving swell moving along the surface of a body of water." The definition is correct, no doubt, but he didn't mention the size or force of waves. And he didn't mention the "Queen Sea", which is a dandy! At South Manitou I observed countless thousands of waves and they always fascinated me. However, I might add that they are more pleasing to the eye when viewed from shore during a gale! I have been out on Lake Michigan among the big ones, and a few times I would have been more comfortable with my feet under the table in the crew's quarters.

There are sparkling wavelets that ripple along the sides of a boat, making little splashing noises as you cut through them. They are beautiful in the sunshine and add life to the lake's surface. When the big lake lies dead calm, like a millpond, it lacks appeal.

A twenty-mile breeze does something else. The waves aren't large, but they do sport pretty little whitecaps that tumble joyfully when they crest. Sometimes they are a nuisance if you're quartering through them at ten knots, because they invariably shower you with spray. When they reach shore, they splash merrily on the stony beach and hardly have time to get back in the lake before their partner wave, which is following closely, overtakes them. Sometimes they get mixed up, merge together, and come in as a double-

header. That creates the "long one" – the one that makes the beach walker jump to avoid getting his feet wet!

The big ones are the awe-inspiring types. They run farther apart and are extremely forceful. When they hit the outer bar they lose their footing completely as they crest and then fall in a smother of foam. Then regaining their stride and momentum, they hit the shore with a crash, sweeping driftwood and stones before it. They swirl high and wide and often reach a wall of sand high on the shore. There they climb high before rushing back lake-ward, often taking flotsam or stones with them in their mad rush. Beach walking is a hazardous pastime during a full gale. I have seen waves swirl backwards after hitting a sand wall that could carry a man with it. Beach patrols were made in every kind of weather known to man, but when high seas lashed the shoreline the patrolman always sought high ground away from the surging waters.

The dead swell is a wave that lacks enthusiasm. It's fun to ride them, because they do not crest and are therefore dry. At a moderate speed a boat glides up one side and down the other, creating a slow roller coaster effect. Dead swells hitting the beach come in silently and flatten out on the shore with great swishing sounds. Some times they sneak up on one and the beach walker often finds himself ankle deep before he can quick step away. In summer it's best to walk barefoot, if you can amble over the stones without flinching!

The Queen Sea is the most irritating when you're lakeborne in a gale. There is no definite measurement, but about every forth or fifth wave encountered will be larger than its brothers. They come at you hard and if they crest as you start to climb them, they will smother you, but good! If you are running before them, they lift you high and they drop you into the following trough with a sickening slide.

Running before a following sea is tricky, because a big one could broach you and then you're in real trouble!

Oddly enough, in black night the seas loom larger than they really are. Perhaps it's because their white crests add to their dimensions.

After a rough crossing to the Island with the Queens and her brothers harassing one all the way, the shelter of South Island Bay is gratefully accepted.

***

A December Crossing

It was a blustery, raw December day. The wind was out of the northwest and had blown snow flurries before it all day. Some of the snow-squalls reduced visibility to less than a mile and the wind had a sting to it.

August and Ben were on the mainshore. I don't recall their mission there, but they were both anxious to return to the Island. Ben was especially concerned about getting back. Two days on the mainshore was about all he could endure. The weather had been adverse with north and northeast winds making a landing at Glen Haven impossible.

Towards noon the wind slacked off a bit and Lonzo, August's oldest son, said he would attempt a crossing if I would go with him. Captain Bill said I could go, but cautioned that the weather wasn't too favorable. I was aware of that, but August had called from the Haven and stated that there wasn't too much weather on the dock there.

Lon was willing, so we got the Lenore off her mooring and started out. Lon was able to handle the Lenore's engine as good as anyone. The Lenore always behaved well when she had the power, and I was glad to have Lon tending her engine.

We were quartering before the wind and rolling beautifully when we cleared the lee of the Island.

In mid-channel the snow flurries blotted out both the mainshore and the Island. It seemed like we were cruising down the middle of Lake Michigan with no land in sight.

About three miles off of Glen Haven both of us noticed that the wind had freshened somewhat. Lon mentioned it to me and remarked, "Do you think we'll be able to dock there?" "That's a good question!" I answered, "We'll see how it looks when we get there."

The lake was kicking its heels higher as we neared the dock, with waves running within three feet of its top. It

appeared that our trip over was going to be unsuccessful because it would be too risky to bring the Lenore in for a landing. "No way, Lon!" I said and he agreed.

August and Ben were near the end of the dock and waiting for us. They would be greatly disappointed if they saw us turn about and head back for the Island.

Then I got an idea. "Lon," I said, "if you'll handle that engine right, we'll run alongside the dock close enough for them to jump aboard. What do you say to that?" "That's pretty close to trouble," he said, "but it's worth a try."

We slacked the Lenore off to half speed and eased towards the dock. "Cut her off when I tell you, Lon, and then be ready to open her up as soon as those guys are aboard!" "O.K. I'm ready." he replied.

It took some wheeling but I brought her in within three or four feet of the dock without scraping any paint off her side. I opened the forward window and yelled to them. "Jump when she rises on a sea; and one of you at a time. Careful!" Then to Lon, "Back her, back her!" That he did, beautifully and the old Lenore hung there with hardly a quiver, raising her bow within three feet of the dock's edge on each coursing wave. August leaped first and I had a bad moment when he slipped as he hit the deck, because he couldn't swim a stroke! He burst into the cabin still clinching his pipe between locked jaws. Ben made it as the Lenore raised her bow on the third wave, exclaiming, "By Yasus, that's it!" "Kick her in the ribs, Lon!" I yelled, and put her hard over. We took three or four dandy rolls in the trough before she answered her helm and came about.

The run home to the Island was routine. We had glimpses of the Island between the snow squalls. The ride was a little rough and the Lenore iced up a bit. The only heat we had in the cabin was from her engine, and we were all pretty well chilled when we reached the shelter of South Island Bay.

The wind had hauled more to the west when we arrived, and we left the Lenore at the station dock. I don't remember if we took her back to her mooring spar that evening, but I'm certain we were all ready for the warmth of that old wood burner in the crew's quarters.

***

When Mackey Got Caught With His Pants Off

It was November and nearing Thanksgiving. The sky was partly overcast that night with a few clouds scurrying along before a moderate NE breeze and it was chilly, with the temperature in the mid to upper thirties.

Somewhere around 11 p.m. Mackey awoke to nature's call and had to make a quick trip to the little building back of the woodshed. In cold weather those trips were expedited!

Mac always turned in at night wearing his long underwear, shirt and socks. He could always jump into his pants and shoes quickly if an emergency arose.

Mac figured to be out in the chilly breeze just a few minutes so without pants and shoes, he hurried down the stairway, through the anteroom and around the corner of the woodshed.

It so happened that the Fishers had company that night. Mac said later that he heard the women folks chattering as he passed along the hallway on his way out, but he didn't know that they were about ready to leave!

Mac was on his way back and was rounding the corner of the woodshed when he stopped abruptly. There on the doorstep of the Station stood the Haases and the Becks. Man dear, what was he going to do now! He considered making a dash for the north door of the Station, but that wouldn't work because he remembered that that door was invariably locked. He was in a fix and shivering.

Most women have a habit of delaying their departure by standing in the doorway and prolonging the visit for several minutes. The night that Mac stood behind the woodshed was no exception. Several times he summoned up enough courage to make a run for the Station, attired as he

was in long johns, shirt and stocking feet. But he always chickened out!

Finally, after what seemed an hour to Mac, the company left, and he high-tailed it into the Station with his shirttail flapping in the breeze and his feet numb.

He related his experience the next morning before muster, ending up his story with an emphatic, "I damn near froze!"

***

Uncle John Hutzler's Wild Bull

Bob said he didn't remember exactly how long John's bull had been roaming the wooded hills adjacent to his farm. John had put feed out in various places many times and the bull had enjoyed the handouts immensely. But John's attempts to lure him into the barn had been futile. Then John started placing the feedings closer to the barn and each time Mr. Bull edged closer to the barn's open door. However, when John approached him, he would wheel and race off across the field and into the woods. That bull was wilder than a Jay Hawk! All of John's plans to tame him had failed, but he wasn't about to give up.

Another plan involved placing the feed near the barn door. The bull was skeptical of this scheme, but after much reconnoitering, he did approach the barn and with great caution devoured the feedings. John remained out of sight and continued placing the feed by the barn door for several days. Then he started placing the feed inside the barn.

The bull's desire to eat overcame his caution and for several days he entered the barn to enjoy his meals. Now John thought he had him, but each time he raced toward the barn to slam the door shut the bull would hear him coming and charge out of the barn and disappear again into the woods! John was near his wits' end and wondered if he could ever catch his wild bull.

After much thought he did conceive a trap that could corner the bull. He rigged up a long wire to the barn door and ran it to the house. This device would enable him to close the door quickly while the bull was enjoying his meal inside. Bob and Mackey were invited up the John's place to assist him if his plan worked.

The bull came up that afternoon and entered the barn to partake his feed and John was ready for him. Then a

few moments later he heaved on the wire and the barn door creaked shut with a bang! At last he had the bull cornered. Bob said, "Now John, what are you going to do?" John's reply was brief, "I'm going to shoot him! That son-of-a- gun isn't going to get away this time."

Bob said John produced the old blunderbuss, the wads and the powder, but he lacked a lead bail. Now that was a problem, but not for John! He dug up an old fish net lead which, when used properly, anchors the bottom line of a gill net. Then he scraped it down to fit the muzzle of the old gun. A net lead is usually about three inches long. That was too long, so John shaped his slug to about an inch in length. Bob said, "That's a pretty heavy shot, John."

"I want a good big one," he replied, "something that will really put that bull down."

Then he poured in a huge charge of powder before ramming home the hand shaped slug.

Armed with his cannon John approached the barn cautiously, so as not to alarm the trapped bull, which very well could have crashed out of the old door. Bob and Mackey followed at a safe distance.

John opened the barn door a few inches and peered in. There was the bull about twenty feet away and looking right at him. Slowly he shoved the gun through the opening, took a quick aim and fired. If it hadn't been for the mercy of Almighty God, that gun would have exploded in John's face! The concussion was tremendous and made the old barn rattle to the roof beams. The fish net slug found its mark and the bull was down and out on the barn floor.

Bob and Mackey helped John dress out his wayward bull before heading back for the Station and they had a tale to tell the crew that day! I regret that I wasn't with them that afternoon when John blasted the life out of that old bull, which had eluded him so many times.

***

A Rough Ride
Fall of '27

It was a partly cloudy and breezy afternoon when August and I departed for Glen Haven to pick up two telephone line inspectors. I was off watch and the Old Man said I could cross with August and the old Lenore.

The wind was fairly strong when we reached midchannel and picking up seas considerably. The sun had hid itself behind the wind blown clouds and the weather didn't look good to me. I said to August, "Looks like we're in for some foul weather, Augie. What do you think?" August agreed with me, and added, "I hope those two telephone fellers are good sailors. It's going to be a bit choppy on our return to South Island."

The two telephone fellows were waiting for us when we arrived at Glen Haven. With wind out of the SW there was considerable shelter at the Big Dock at Glen Haven, but the Lenore was rolling gently as she slacked and tightened her mooring lines. One of the telephone fellows remarked, "Is it going to be rough out there on our way to the island?" I didn't want to frighten him so I said, "Could be a little, but we'll make it O.K." August looked at me and grinned. He knew!

After we had cleared the Bear for a mile we started to hit the big ones. We were quartering the SW seas and the Lenore was famous for her roll with winds in that direction. She could roll you dizzy!

One of the telephone fellows sat on the bench seat on the port side of the Lenore's cabin, in front of the window. The other guy came out and stood with me on the fantail. The Lenore had a lot of freeboard and seldom shipped a sea when running before a wind. An iron railing was mounted on the after end of the Lenore's cabin. If one's sea legs weren't too good, he could hold on to that railing

and steady himself. I told him to hang on, because the old Lenore was now roiling with the big ones. I thought my fellow passenger was getting a bit seasick because he wasn't talking much. That's a sure sign!

Well, we rolled and rolled and I was sure those fellows were scared stiff.

The wind was reaching gale force and kicking up the seas higher. I was watching the big ones and telling the fellow with me to hang on good when they hit us. Man, he was scared! Then I saw a whopper coming at us and I hollered, "Hang on!" She hit us hard and we took a mighty roll. For a moment I wondered if the old Lenore would right herself. But she did. The big sea stove in the window where the other fellow sat and knocked him across the cabin and he was drenched with about a barrel of cold water.

The big sea that hit us came over the fantail and soaked us almost to the knees. My fellow passenger, next to me was frightened stiff! He yelled, "Are we going to sink? We will all drown!"

"Steady yourself fellow!" I called back, "Just hang on. We'll make it O.K." I doubt if he believed me! And I made matters worse for him when I yelled, above the wind, "If you think this weather is bad, wait until August takes you back to Glen Haven tonight." That did it.

"Oh, my God," he cried, "if we make it to the island I am never going to return to the mainshore until it is calm! Maybe we are all going to drown!"

We finally rolled home and weren't boarded with any more Queen Seas. Two happy telephone guys boarded our dock and were taken to the Crew's quarters to dry off.

Two Frankfort tugs were lying weather at the island when we returned. It was a bit too sloopy for them, too! It was sort of a nasty afternoon. Routine for August and me. We had been out in 'em before.

***

Morning at South Manitou
(When My Bunk Was Near the East Window)

I awoke early when gray dawn was but a quiver in the east, and listened to the wind. The Lombardy poplars were pattering softly in the faint dawn and the curtains at my window bloomed gently, as rhythmic drafts eddied through the screen. It was a gentle breeze, fragrant with early morning smells – the dew covered grass – the lilacs down the lane, and interwoven into it all the damp, fresh smell of the lake.

Faintly, between the poplar serenades came the sound of long even surges. Suddenly a whippoorwill sent out his impatient, clarion call, and an answer came out of the pine grove. The halyards on the steel flag pole thrummed out a hollow sound, as the light of early day grew stronger; but it was cloudy, and the night left reluctantly. I fell back to sleep on a cool, soft pillow and let the poplars stir restlessly in the early morning light.

***

Family Visits at South Manitou

My father and my two brothers, Hollis and Stanley, visited the Island several times. Mother was at the Island just once. She never forgot that trip!

Cap Fisher took me to Pentwater in September 1927 and we persuaded mother to return with us and spend a few days there. At that time Captain Palmer was after me to transfer to the Ludington Station. Mother would have liked that, because I would have been nearer to home, but Cap Fisher wanted me to remain in his crew. He wanted mother to see the Island so she could see how nice it was there. Mother did enjoy her visit there and thought it was a beautiful place, but she didn't enjoy her ride in the old Liberty that blustery night in September. The lake was quite rough and she got sick!

Ma Fisher had a nice lunch waiting for us when we arrived that night. I'll never forget mother's words when she entered the Station. "Oh, I can't eat anything! I just want to go to bed!" That she did and she was O.K. the next morning. Mother did enjoy her South Manitou visit and told me she could understand why I wanted to remain there. A few days later we returned to the mainshore. The weather was nice and she enjoyed the crossing to Glen Haven.

Dad enjoyed his Island visits, too, but he wasn't a good sailor, either. He got sick a few times when we crossed the lake. Brothers Stan and Hollis always hated to leave the Island when they had to return home. My sisters, Joyce and Ruth, never made it to the Island. I wish they could have visited there.

***

I Remember …

… an early June morning when the dawn was creeping over Pyramid Point. In the stillness and beauty of that quiet morning, I stood leaning against the lookout railing and saw the waning moon steer her course westward, hurrying along her lingering moonbeams, lest they be caught and perish in the new born day.

I Remember –

... Captain Bill's distaste for one of the records we frequently played on our little phonograph. If I recall correctly, the name of the song was "Fatima." The first verse or perhaps the chorus, I've forgotten which, ran like this:

"Lock your doors and windows
And say we're out today,
For here comes Fatima
On her Tar-um-bum-de-a."

When we played that record Capt. Bill would leave the crew's quarters immediately, blowing clouds of smoke from his pipe and muttering something about "… that damned tune!"

I Remember …

… Ben Johnson's coffee when he served it at four o'clock in the afternoon.

I was visiting Ben in his fish shanty one afternoon. He was dressing out a mess of suckers, and I was perched up on an old fish box watching him. In the midst of one of his sailing stories he hauled out his watch and said, "Yah, it's time for some good hot coffee. C'mon Crowner and have a cup with me."

"O.K., Ben." I replied, and I followed him up to his house. Ben brewed a fresh pot of coffee every morning, and at that early hour it was strong enough to choke a mule! Then he shoved the pot to the back of the range and I'm sure it simmered there for hours, because he kept the range fire going all day; not a hot fire, but enough to keep his coffee hot.

Ben poured me a big cup. One sip of it nearly crossed my eyes! I poured in Pet Milk until the cup was full and then dumped in a generous helping of sugar. That modified the brew considerably, but it was still strong enough to curl the hair on your chest.

I downed it along with some bread and butter, but it did take courage!

Ben drank his black. The tough old Norwegian liked it that way!

I Remember …

… Ralph Thompson and his great love for potatoes, whether they were boiled, mashed or fried! I have never met his equal since I left South Manitou!

Boiled potatoes were often served at our noontime meals at South Island. The first time I saw Ralph load up his plate with potatoes, I couldn't believe what I saw! I always thought I could stow away about as many spuds as the next guy, but Ralph proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I was only a piker when it came to eating potatoes. I sat next to Ralph at our mess table and always marveled at his technique.

Our mess plates were the Government types, large and deep and capable of holding a considerable helping of food. Ralph would spear four or five potatoes, mash them up thoroughly and then work them into a great mound on his plate. If they lacked the depth of three inches in the center of his plate, he often added another one. Then he smoothed out the mound, spread it with a generous coating of butter and added salt and pepper. He never revealed his thoughts, but I always imagined if he had spoken, the sentence would have been, "Ah, now let's get with it!"

It's hard to believe, but Ralph went through that first helping in record time. Then – and this is the Gospel truth – he loaded up his plate again with an equal amount of potatoes. After clearing away a space large enough to accommodate his pork chop or

round steak (which always leaned against his plate while he enjoyed the first helping) he sliced and ate it with the remaining potatoes.

Fried potatoes? You would never believe it if I told you the quantity required to satisfy his evening appetite!

I Remember …

… Inspector Benson inspected South Island Station the summer of 1927 and we executed the Beach Cart Drill faster than any crew in the Tenth District. From the moment Captain Bill cried, "Action!" 'til the drill man swung down from the breeches buoy onto the drill grounds, the elapsed time was exactly three minutes! It required coordination and skill from every crewman to perform the Beach Cart Drill in that record time.

I Remember …

… the nostalgic scent of burning hardwood and steam, in the fog signal building, when the Lighthouse crew had steamed up in the boiler and were sounding for fog. Again, I can hear that big whistle sending its mournful blast across the fog-shrouded lake.

I Remember When …

… Bob was interested in motorcycles. He read an ad for an Indian cycle and sent in for their catalog, filling out the small coupon "B. Johnson." He waited for the catalog, but it never arrived in his mail. He mentioned the delay to Lillian one day, and she said "Why, Bob, a motorcycle catalog did come in the mail about two weeks ago addressed to B. Johnson, and I put it in Ben Johnson's mail." Bob tried to persuade Ben that the catalog was his, but Ben insisted it belonged to him. "See here?" Ben said, holding up the mailing envelope for Bob to see. "It says B. Johnson and that's me!" Ben loaned his catalog to Bob, but never gave it to him. We couldn't imagine Ben buying a motorcycle and it would have been the eighth wonder of the world if he ever rode one!

I Remember When …

… Capt. Bill promised Uncle Bill Haas that he would send two men up on a Monday morning to help him butcher and dress out our winter's beef supply.

Uncle Bill arose on the appointed day, ate his breakfast and did the chores. Then thinking he would get a drop on the job, brought out the steer to be butchered, knocked him in the head and bled him.

Then he waited. Nine o'clock rolled around, but no one showed up to help him. At ten o'clock Bill was fit to be tied! There

laid the steer, getting colder by the minute, and no help in sight. The morning was cold, but Bill warmed up the air considerably with a steady flow of choice cuss words.

Finally he had to go down to brother Henry's place and get him to help dress out the critter.

Around three o'clock that afternoon Uncle Bill drove up to the station with our beef, and he was in an ugly mood. Capt. Bill met him in the hallway, but before he could utter a word of greeting Uncle Bill cut loose.

"Where in the blankety-blank hell were those men you promised to send up to help me?"

"Now wait a minute, Uncle Bill," Cap replied, "you're straddling the wrong log. Today is Sunday, not Monday."

Uncle Bill was really taken aback and some of the anger faded from his dark eyes.

"Well I'll be damned!" he muttered.

Capt. Bill opened the kitchen door and called out, "Mother, warm up some coffee. Uncle Bill needs something to steady him up!"

Later we helped unload the quartered and sectioned beef and stored it upstairs in the woodshed.

Uncle Bill was considerably cooled off when he hi-ho'd his team up the State Road on the way back to his farm. I have often wondered if he still thought it was Monday when he knocked down that steer!

Remembering a March Day in '27

Hail to the Chinook wind that's blowing up the passage today! Great masses of ice that reach to the Bear are moving slowly Nor'easterward before its warm breath.

From the lookout, I can see patches of blue water sparkling in the sunshine. Tomorrow, the passage should be clear of the ponderous ice floes. Then the gales of March will send great waves crashing into the ice banks along the shoreline, rending them apart with thunderous power, so once again they can break over the bars and feel the sandy shore.

***

George and Louis Hutzler
International Rosen Rye Champions

George and his son Louis worked hard for the championship. George owned a good farm and kept his fields in excellent shape with natural fertilizers. The modern methods of farming and all the multiple varieties of soil conditioners were never used by George. He left fields lay fallow, plowed down clover and used animal manure. And it worked!

George told me that getting the championship entailed a lot of work. The most tedious job was getting that one-peck of perfect rye ready for the exhibition.

"Louis and I worked several weeks going over around forty bushels of rye to get that one perfect peck." George said. And he added, "Louis picked for color and I picked for size. It was one whale of a job. I don't think we'd ever attempt to do it again."

I never did find out what became of their beautiful trophy.

***

Voting at Ben Johnson's House On the Point

Many people have asked me if we ever had a chance to vote, being on an island way out on Lake Michigan and isolated, so to speak.

I told them that we did vote and that we weren't always isolated. We were good sailors and reached the mainshore many times during rough weather. But we always voted at Ben Johnson's house.

Ben had a little pantry off his kitchen. On voting days Ben gave us our ballot and we entered the little room and in complete privacy cast our vote. Ben always made sure the ballot was folded properly before he placed it in the metal container. August would take the sealed votes to Glen Haven on his next mail trip.

I voted several times at "Ben's Precinct" while a Coast Guardsman at South Manitou, but I'll be honest about it, at times I wasn't sure if I was votin' for the right guy!

Ben always had a steaming pot of his throat burning coffee available for voting guests. Some voters skipped the coffee and indulged in their own "liquid refreshments."

***

South Manitou's Lake Florence

Sparkling jewel cuddled deep in the bosom of her mother Isle. Alive and dancing when caressed by summer breezes that send countless wavelets shoreward, to lap softly on her sandy shore.

Fringed with tree lined rustic roads that encircle her completely, with little openings here and there where one can glimpse her beauty.

When summer fades away southward before the north wind's chilly breath, the hardwoods dress themselves in gorgeous fall array. Then she lies quietly and mirrors the beauty of the autumn woods and the deep blue sky.

Winter is her resting time, when she sleeps peacefully beneath the drifting snow and solid ice, while the silent gaunt trees, bereft of their summer dress, stand like lonely sentinels along her curving shore.

Springtime's warm and eager sun throws back her snowy mantle and she awakens to the eerie call of the loon, while again the wild geese wing their way northward and add their lonely cry to the spring's magic dawn.

Dear to my memory are her countless moods; ever changing with the passing seasons, but ever remaining that beautiful body of water I remember as Lake Florence.

***

Tom Foster's Apple Orchard and the Mill

Tom Foster's farm lay about a mile west of the big dock. He owned a fairly large apple orchard, and a sawmill that stood at the road intersection that was a mile or so due south of the little cemetery. I often browsed around that old mill, wondering how it appeared in its heyday, when Island logs were sawed and planed there.

Several pieces of machinery were still there and rusting away. The steam engine that ran the mill was long gone, but the boiler still remained. Atop the boiler at the end of a pipe was a safety valve. I am sure that no one would have noticed if I had sawed off that pipe below the valve and kept it as a souvenir. But the theft was always put off, and I never got around to claiming that old corroded valve. What a wonderful memory piece that would have been.

Tom Foster wasn't living at South Island in 1927. I saw the man just once when he visited his old farm in 1927. Very little remains of the old orchard. Here and there one can see an old scrawny tree, but most of them have rotted and returned to the Island soil.

***

A Christmas Eve I Remember — 1927

It was cold and windy most of December. Moderate to heavy seas continued to roll before stiff northerly winds and we were more or less isolated. August hadn't made a crossing with the Lenore for several days.

The wind abated just before Christmas and the mail and our presents arrived before Christmas Eve. We were happy to help August load his big wheelbarrow before he headed for the Post Office. Lake Michigan was still free of ice, but ice was forming along the shore and the beach was slick under a few inches of snow.

Christmas Eve was quiet and the big lake was resting after a week of turbulence. I had the ten to midnight watch in the lookout. It was a beautiful night, but starless. The Point was snow covered and caressed by the soft glow of our Light. How beautiful the scene as I leaned against the south railing of our lookout and breathed in the cold, crisp air!

I thought of home and my dear ones there, remembering other Christmas Eves when mother played those wonderful Christmas songs. Silent Night was always my favorite and I stood there facing the Light, in its brightness, that song flashed back with all its beauty. "Silent night; Holy night. All is calm. All is bright." It was all the more beautiful because that was the way the island appeared that night. Our beloved Light could well have been the Star of Bethlehem, with Angels singing softly beneath its radiance.

~~

Tonight as I write these few sentences, it is again Christmas Eve. The long years have erased forever the beauty of that night at South Manitou, but the memory of it still lingers in my heart. How I wish I could see, just once more, the snow covered Point, the lighted windows in the

little homes and the long shadows cast by our tall, graceful Light.

Christmas Eve – 1974

The South Manitou Coast Guard Station
Some Changes in 1928

Most of the crewmembers that I served with at South Manitou during 1927 and midway into 1928 had transferred to other Stations in the 10th District. Andrew Fisher replaced our Skipper, Bill Fisher. Crew members that transferred to other Stations were: MoMlC Leon Barratt, Surfmen Alfred Anderson, Robert Johnson, Clifford Deering, Al VanderWagen, Ralph Thompson and Ted Crain, our cook. That left BM1C Willis Mackey and myself; the only two crewmembers remaining from the crew of 1927. Other able personnel replaced crewmembers that left, but it wasn't the same at South Island Station. I did miss our old crew that was serving there when I became a crewmember late in 1926.

Skipper Andrew Fisher changed things around considerably after he arrived at the island the summer of 1928. Our crew was kept on the run most of the time and some of the crew resented it. Most of us thought the roof on the Station was in pretty good shape, but Cap Fisher didn't and that summer we re-shingled it. Showers slowed up the job a couple of times. Those cedar shingles looked pretty good when we finished the job.

"Now," said Cap Fisher, "we'll take a little time off before we start the next job." But we didn't! Lumber was secured from the mainshore for two new outhouses and we went to work constructing them. I can't recall, but I don't think we replaced the pretty lattice screen around the little buildings. The new structures weren't as pretty as the old ones. They were serviceable, but lacked the finesse of the others.

Again we were reminded that a few days off were coming our way, but that wasn't to be. Bright new maple flooring was secured and we laid new floors in the Crew's

Quarters and the Mess room. That was a job! We all wound up with sore knees and a few bruised fingers and thumbs. The new floors looked good, but so did the old ones!

No break was in sight and the Old Man said, "Let's take all the pretty white stones out that surround the Station and side walks and replace them with sod." Big deal! The crew wasn't in favor of the job, but it was started.

Sod was hauled from grass fields on the island. When Bob left the island, the summer of '28 he didn't take his mare Kate with him and she was sheltered in a small barn back of the Light. A small wagon was obtained from one of the farmers and the sod hauling job was started with Kate pulling the wagon. The little wagon was never loaded heavily because Kate was old and a full wagon would have taxed her strength.

So the grass squares replaced the pretty white stones. They were laid on a sand base and they required a lot of water. Every night four crewmembers were assigned to the four-man pump house and water was soaked into the freshly laid sod clumps. That chore continued for weeks! I transferred to White River Station in November that year and the boys were still pumping water on the grass when I left!

Winter weather was approaching and that put an end to all the improvements around the Station. But the summer days before the fall winds started to blow were active ones. All drills were held and watches stood during the renovation and that made every day a busy one.

The wood cutting and splitting job was soon to follow but I was stationed at White River and missed that chore. Compared to the summer activities, the wood sawing job would have been a breeze!

***

Christmas '27

I shall never forget the Christmas of 1927. It was the first Christmas in my life that I wasn't at home with my family, but I wasn't alone in that respect because several other crewmen were single and away from home, too.

It snowed a little before Christmas and around six inches of the beautiful white covered the ground. I think most of us had the Christmas spirit and I must add, there were other forms of "spirits" on the island to enhance the Holidays!

I wanted a little Christmas tree to put up in the crew's quarters. Cap. Fisher told me he was going out to get one for his family in a day or two.

The weather was calm and bright a few days later when he and I set out to get our trees. We didn't have to go far, because there was a nice stand of spruce back of the Light. Cap cut down a nice full six footer and I found a pretty one about eight feet tall that had a beautiful, well-formed top. I topped it and it was just what I wanted.

Later that afternoon I put together a standard for it in the crew's workshop. I removed our little record player, along with the stack of records and placed our little tree on the stand. It was pretty to look at, but it needed some decorations and I didn't have any. Ma Fisher had scarcely enough for their tree, so I popped some corn and strung it out on a long thread. That along with some bits of red and green paper was all I had for decorations. But it did look good even if it did lack the tinsel and bells.

When our Christmas presents arrived they were placed around our little spruce top tree. I am sure that my little tree helped make it a Merry Christmas for all of us.

***

Fish Tugs at South Manitou Island

Rough waters in the fall kept Lake Michigan tumbling much of the time. The tugs out of Frankfort set their nets near the Islands and many times after lifting their nets the weather would worsen, and seas would pick up out of the SW and NW. Rather than work their way through heavy seas to Frankfort, they would seek shelter in the excellent harbor at South Manitou.

There were three steam tugs fishing out of Frankfort the late 20's. I remember well the Comet and the Hazel C. The Hazel C. often tied up at our Station dock. The crew's table and Cap's, too, were well supplied with fresh fish during those rough fall days.

Many times during a bad blow Cap Fisher would call Frankfort and assure the tug crew's families that their tugs were safely tied up in the shelter of South Manitou Bay. Often the weather would moderate before dawn and daybreak would find the tugs gone and on their way home.

***

South Manitou Harbor

Many vessels sought shelter, during gale conditions, in South Manitou Bay. Its crescent shaped shoreline provided calm waters from all gale force winds, except a Nor'easter. The NE blows swept down the passage and right into the bight of our bay. When Nor'easters prevailed, extremely rough waters prevented safe anchorage there.

The Ann Arbor carferries often "laid weather" at South Island during SW and NW storms. They seldom anchored. South Manitou Bay has a "bold beach." That name applies to any shoreline where the water depth drops off shortly into deep water. The carferries eased into the wind and poked their bows nearly up to the shoreline and kept a wheel working slowly to hold them there.

I have passed weather bound carferries, when on beach patrol, and could almost slap their steel bow, which was very close to the beach.

***

The South Patrol on a Windy Fall Night

I walked alone
one starlit
windy night
and saw the clouds,
like stately galleons
pass in flight,
eclipsing the star-beams
with shadowy grace,
as they twinkled
and sparkled
through unending space.
And the surf
came in blasting,
with crests flying high,
like the manes
of wild horses
against the dark sky.
And over my soul
came a glorious peace,
as I walked
in the starlight
beside turbulent seas.

Cutting Up Our Yearly Wood Supply

Willie and Art Beck furnished the wood for our stoves at the Station. Enough wood was cut up to supply for a year the two kitchen ranges and two wood-burners in the Station. A smaller wood stove kept the lookout warm. The Becks also supplied the wood for the Fog Signal Station. It was quartered and delivered in four-foot lengths and fired, full length, in the boilers.

Willie Beck had a good one-cylinder gas engine mounted on a wood skid that powered a large buzz saw. I am not sure but I think the saw was 24 to 30 inches in diameter. A large belt powered the saw and it really hummed when Willie revved up the engine.

Two crewmen supplied the four-foot lengths of wood to Willie who made the 16-inch cuts. One crewman took the cut off the saw and heaved it onto a pile. Then two other crewmen piled up the wood on the east side of our large woodshed. It was a six-man crew, including Willie, and with good weather we cut up a lot of wood in a day. When it snowed and blowed, we took a break.

The wood cutting job usually took place around the first of the year. Snow was on the ground and the weather was crisp, but the cutting job kept one fairly warm. Willie liked to touch up his saw about every two hours and that gave us a fifteen-minute break. Then we would go in the Station and enjoy a cup of coffee and shoot the breeze. Sometimes Willie would join us after he had filed his saw, but he always wanted to get that saw humming again as soon as possible!

The wood job would usually last around three or four days, depending on the weather. But that wasn't the last of it! The big woodshed had to be filled with split wood for the two kitchen ranges. We worked at that job for many days.

There were always jobs to do around the Station to keep everything in top shape. The wood splitting job was an "extra." Often after our drill sessions were over the Old Man would say, "I think a couple of you guys had better work on the wood splitting job today." That job lasted until our big woodshed was loaded to the eaves with good range woods.

During wood sawing and chopping days, there was always one lucky guy and he was the one with the 8 to 12 lookout watch out on the Point. There he could enjoy the cozy warmth of the lookout for four hours while the "saw gang" fed that whining buzz saw and piled the snow covered wood chunks.

***

Kate's Passing

Kate was old, showing gray around her temples and eyes. She had kind eyes, eyes that belied her age and slackened gait.

When Bob transferred to the mainshore the summer of '28, he left his mare Kate on the Island. He asked me to put her to sleep come fall, fearing she wouldn't have the proper care she needed during the winter months. I promised I would do it, but I had misgivings. How I wished he had asked someone else!

October arrived with her blue skies and chilled air. It was time for me to fulfill my promise to Bob. Mac and Pat said they would help me. I cleaned and oiled the Service .45 and loaded it.

The following morning was clear and calm as we set off for the little barn behind the Light to get Kate. The old barn door creaked open and Kate turned her head and looked at us. Pat snapped a short rope into her halter and we started for the clearing, Pat leading Kate with Mac and I bringing up the rear. Kate followed willingly, walking silently in the sand to the spot we had chosen for her grave – a windblown, hollow space where Mac said the digging would be good.

It was a silent procession until Mac said, "This is far enough." Pat held Kate's halter rope and she turned and faced me. I raised the .45 and cocked the hammer. "Wait!" Mac cried, "I can't see this!" and he turned and strode away. I again aimed at the star in her forehead and pulled the trigger. Kate struggled back with a convulsive leap and fell on her back, kicking violently. The halter rope which Pat was holding parted when she surged backwards. Kate struggled to her feet and struck off towards the beach at a gallop.

Collecting my numbed senses, I ran in pursuit, yelling, "Whoa Kate; whoa Kate!" In the distance I heard Mac exclaiming, "Oh my God; oh my God!" I'll never know how Kate had the strength to run as she did that bright October morning. She reached the beach and headed west down the bay. After several hundred feet her pace slackened and I managed to catch up with her. Again I aimed at her head and fired. This time the bullet struck below her ear. She shook her head and again resumed her gallop. The froth from her nose and mouth was now showing crimson.

I followed her as fast as I could and overtook her again after she had run a good quarter mile. Once again she slowed down to a walk. Coming abreast of her I fired another shot into her head. Again she quickened her pace and left me behind the second time. She was now bleeding badly and her strength was fast ebbing away.

When I finally reached her, we were within shouting distance of the big dock. I was winded and doubted if I could run much farther. Kate started to stumble and she wasn't holding her head high anymore. Her valiant efforts were about ended. She turned and moved towards the lake, a pitiful sight. As I approached her, she slowly waded into the lake to a four foot depth, turned around and sat on her haunches, her head protruding above the water. I waded out over waist deep and emptied my remaining two shots into her head. Slowly, ever so slowly, she sank into the cool waters. The last of her lifeblood rose slowly to the surface. It was over. Kate was dead.

I waded ashore and lay on the beach exhausted. I had a notion to heave the .45 out into 20 fathoms of water, but I didn't.

Mac and Pat were coming up the beach carrying the shovels. They joined me a few minutes later and by that time I had regained my wind.

"What's the next move?" Mac asked.

"I'll have to go back to the Station," I said, "and bring back about thirty feet of one inch rope so we can drag Kate out of the lake." Then I started back up the beach.

Upon returning with the rope, I again waded out and fastened the rope around Kate's neck. Then we three heaved away with all our strength and dragged her high and dry on the beach.

Mac and Pat did most of the digging and soon we were ready to slide her into her sandy grave. We were edging her towards her last resting place when Mac said, "Wait! We're putting her in the wrong way. We must turn her around so she can face the Resurrection!" That we did and then gently covered her with cool, damp sand.

It was all over at last, and with very little conversation we made our way up the shore towards the Point.

"Why," I thought, "did it have to happen this way?"

***

Iced In

Many people have asked me how we maintained contact with the mainshore during the winter months. I told them we had telephones!

They meant, of course, how did we get across the passage without boats. To be sure there were days and sometimes several weeks when we were ice-bound. After field ice formed, a good Nor'easter would plug the bay up completely. Many days at eventide our bay would be entirely free of ice. Then a Nor'easter would come whirling in out of nowhere and there wouldn't be a drop of water visible the next morning, just miles and miles of whiteness as far as the eye could see. Then the checkerboard was worn a little deeper; our little record player sang more songs and we had more time to split wood. There was always something to do!

~~

Now I'll attempt to tell you about one of our "icing ins."

It was late January and we had several days of sharp freezing weather. It was unusually calm and the bay froze over completely. Here and there one could see large blobs of white floe ice that looked like little islands dotting the bay. Each day and night the bitter cold thickened the ice in the lake until it was nearly a foot in depth. It was beautiful to see, especially in starlight.

One midnight, after being relieved from lookout duty, I walked down to the station dock. Overhead a million stars shimmered in the darkened sky, casting a star-glow over the entire bay. It was dead clam. Occasionally a great thrrump would break the silence – the sound of heavy ice freezing, and I remembered that sound from boyhood. It often frightened me on Pentwater Lake and I foolishly wondered if the ice was breaking up under me, even though

it was over a foot thick! It is an eerie sound that will startle one who doesn't understand its source.

Two days after I had enjoyed that midnight under the star-studded sky we had a change of weather. The glass took a dive and the wind freshened out of the Nor'east. I relieved Mackey in the lookout at 2 p.m. that day. He had a cheerful fire going in the wood-burner. The window on the lee side was open and we leaned on the wainscoting and chatted a few minutes before he left. "Sure looks like we're going to get it." he said, "That glass has really fallen since I came on watch." And he was right – we did get it!

At 3 p.m. the gale had increased to at least 40 knots, whipping in through the bight of our bay, dead on the beach. The lookout windows rattled with each increasing blast and low flying clouds scudded before the gale. There was no snow and the visibility was good.

I shall never forget what happened during the ensuing half-hour. From far out in the bay, intermingled with the howling gale, came a low rumbling sound much like thunder sounded in an approaching summer squall. The great expanse of sheet ice was starting to buckle before the gale! A great ridge of shelved ice appeared out in the bay, crunching and grinding, and the ice at the shoreline was starting to bulge, too.

It's hard to describe what transpired in the next few minutes. That great frozen mass, no longer able to withstand the gale's force, began to crumble and push shoreward. On it came with thunderous might as if a mighty hand was thrusting it along. The ice gouged the shoreline and stacked up great windrows twenty feet high. The sounds created by the crushing ice, though muted somewhat by the singing gale, were tremendous. Soon the great push was over and then windrow after windrow appeared in the bay. The gale continued throughout the night, jamming the ice tighter and

tighter in the ice-bound bay. We all wondered when we would receive the next mail.

Summer visitors, enjoying the calm waters and warming sun, could never believe the stories of winter gales, which drove the crunching, threshing ice shoreward to shut us in from the outside world.

***

I Remember …

… when the Lighthouse crew used to brag about the speed of their power boat. They wanted to race their boat against our *"Liberty."*

Mackey tried to make a bet with them, but they never accepted it.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," he said, "we'll fasten a line to that tub of yours and start to tow you to Glen Haven and you'll never slacken that line once." They never took us up on that bet, but I really believe it would have been a draw, because neither boat was very fast.

I Remember …

… the apple blossoms were in bloom in May down at the old Haas place and a gentle south wind came ashore, pushing little wavelets before it and was laden with the sweetness of a million apple blossoms.

I Remember …

… John Hutzler arrived at the post office on a Monday morning as Lillian was sacking up the mail for August. John was dressed in his Sunday suit, white shirt and tie. Turning to Jim who was leaning on the counter, he said, "I see they're carrying the mail on Sunday now, Jim."

"Not yet John," Jim replied, "today is Monday." John was more than perplexed. He wheeled and strode out the door and headed back to the farm. It's easy to confuse the dates when one lives alone. John put in a seven-day week that time!

I Remember …

… one of the butterscotch pies that our cook, Ted Crain made. It was about an inch thick and it looked good.

Al was the first crewman to try his piece. His fork went down in the pie nearly an inch, but he couldn't cut off the end of it. All it did was make a hairline crease across the pie. Then he dropped it on the floor of our mess room and it actually bounced!

We never found out how Crain put that pie together. It would have made a good sole for a tennis sneaker!

I Remember …

… how the South Island Light was painted. No modern hoists were available, as they are today. One of the Lighthouse crewmembers was swung over the top railing of the Light in a Bos'ns chair, along with the painting mixture and a large brush. Then he swung to and fro, like a clock pendulum while applying the white mixture. It wasn't a regular paint and I never did find out the ingredients, but after it dried it was a pure white.

I was in the lookout, standing the morning four-hour watch when Scofield painted the topmost part of the light. It was a rounded dome with a lightning rod on top. He had to crawl above that last ladder rung to reach the lightning rod. It gave me the "willies" just to watch him. One slip or a misstep would have put him over the side and down a hundred and nineteen feet to the light's base.

I wouldn't have painted that lightning rod for all the money in Michigan!

I Remember …

… one bright spring day when I was standing watch in the lookout on the Point. At that time August Warner had a few ducks. One of the hen ducks had hatched some young and they (about the size of a robin) were waddling around on the Point.

Some gulls were soaring and occasionally diving for a small fish in the lake. Then to my amazement one of the gulls spotted the ducklings, swooped down and grabbed one and flew off with it. I was always under the impression that gulls dined mostly on fish, but that gull evidently wanted fresh meat!

I Remember …

… a dark, quiet night in the spring of 1927, several of the gang, including myself, were in the crew's quarters. Two crewmen, who had the midnight to four watch were about ready to sack out. I don't recall who was on lookout duty.

Suddenly the alarm bell in the hallway clattered its warning. A crewman dashed to the hallway phone. "Station!"

"Dad Furst's shanty is on fire!" cried the lookout watch.

Our well-trained crew went into action fast. Three crewmen grabbed fire buckets and chemical while others raced to the little pump station to man the four-man pump.

I reached Dad Fursts little house along with other crewmen and we burst through the door. The stove lids were all off the kitchen range and flames were leaping up a good three feet from the top of the range. Two buckets of water and a few shots from the chemical extinguisher put out the blaze.

We learned from a frustrated mother Furst that she had removed the lids off the range, placed kindling and

paper on the grate and then doused it with a good measure of kerosene before touching it off with a match.

An alert crewman in the Point Lookout who saw the flames leaping up from that stove top and alerted the crew averted a tragedy. It was another first for the Coast Guard motto – *Semper Paratus.* Always prepared!

WAVES

Before the gale the long waves race shoreward, dressed with whitecaps that are wind whipped into swirling spray.

Always hurrying to keep ahead of their countless sisters who follow in like manner, cresting and tumbling but always regaining their stride before they hit the outer bar.

Then in utter confusion they lose their rhythm and crash thunderously over the shallow bars.

They recover quickly and surge onto the beach, carrying stones and driftwood before them with tremendous power.

They swirl high over the shoreline before retreating lakeward in great sweeping masses, rattling a myriad of stones and often bearing a driftwood log for a sister wave to wash higher.

Then they die and become only a part of the great storm-bound lake.

***

My Hikes Around the Island

Each crewman at the South Island Station was entitled to a liberty day – we always called it a day off – about every eight days. The time allotted for the day off was from 8 a.m. to the following day at 7:45 a.m. Those were good days to be excused from all drills and work days around the Station. Often we did our washing, wrote letters, took hikes, visited the farmers or just loafed around.

I enjoyed hiking. Many times I enjoyed hiking around the Island and that hike, if I circled the Island, was around eleven miles. Most of the long hikes were taken during spring, summer and fall months. A few times I circled the Island during the winter months, but snow and ice on the beach made walking difficult. A few times I did climb the west side bluffs to get some winter pictures, but those frozen, steep western bluffs were certainly a challenge!

At times the winter weather would worsen. Then I would decide to call it a day and head east from the bluffs and then through the woods back to the Station.

The summer hikes were most pleasant. I would start off around 8:30 in the morning with my camera, holstered revolver and three or four chocolate bars. The candy bars curbed my appetite!

I usually returned with diverse articles, picked up on the beach. Once I found a large bar of wax. It was rounded a bit by the surf and imbedded with sand on its surface, but it was a good one! Gill net fishermen used aluminum floats in those days and many times I returned with my pickets full of those floats. I always gave them to my old fisherman friend, Ben Johnson, and he would say, "Yah, Crowner, those are good ones."

Once I found an inflated football that some high school boy had kicked into the lake. It was still in good shape. Upon returning from my beach hike that day, I gave

the football to one of the Warner boys, I think it was Leon. He didn't own it long because he promptly kicked it through one of his Dad's house windows! August was really shook up and so was Leon! We never saw that football again!

I often climbed the big bluffs on the west side of the Island. Until you have seen Lake Michigan from their crests, you will never know how beautiful it really is. On a sunny day the big lake is a great mass of blue water beneath the cloudless sky.

On a clear day a narrow strip of Washington Island is visible on the Wisconsin side of the lake.

I most always managed to return to the Station in time for mess at 6 p.m. And hungry! I really put the food away after the ten hour, around the Island hike.

***

Young George Tobin's Illness

I will always remember the night that George Tobin was so ill and August Warner crossed over to Glen Haven in a dense fog to bring Doc Murphy to the Island. Steamers were numerous in the Passage those days and on that particular night there was considerable traffic. Our fog signal on the point was sending out its mournful signal blast each minute and big freighters up-bound and down-bound were sounding their three warning blasts as they worked their way past South Manitou. It was a whistle serenade to be sure. But for Doc Murphy, the thought of crossing that fog bound lake amid the freighter traffic was frightening to him.

Doc Murphy wasn't an alcoholic by any means, but in times of stress, and surely those up and down-bound big freighters were causes for great concern to him, he did fortify his courage with frequent nips of good Canadian whisky.

Our Coast Guard crew put together a wooden stretcher. It was lined with heavy blankets, making it comfortable for young George to lie in.

Upon reaching the Island, August tied up at the small dock in front of the Lighthouse. The big whistle at the fog signal station was silenced while we placed George in the old Lenore. Then August headed out again through the darkness of the fog-shrouded lake.

Doc Murphy's concern for George's life – and the boy was seriously ill – no doubt eased that old Doc's fear of the fog-sounding freighters. Surely the trip saved the boy's life. But old Doc Murphy sincerely hoped that he would never again have to make anymore crossings on a dark, fog shrouded lake.

***

Crain's Fifth of Wine

Ted Crain had a day off, and the weather being good, he decided to cross the lake in the Liberty and spend the day in Traverse City. It was late when he returned. Somewhere in Traverse he bought a fifth of Port wine. No one knew where he had it hid until the next day.

Our weekly floor clean up was on Saturdays and on that particular day Al and Bob had the sleeping quarters. The floor was always mopped, windows cleaned and if needed, the large water buckets outside the sleeping quarters were emptied and filled with fresh water. I am not sure whether it was Al or Bob that noticed that Crain's locker door was opened but, lo and behold! There was the fifth, resting on a shelf.

If you knew Bob and Al you would know what happened! Those two sailors consumed very nicely Crain's fifth of Port. Bob said it was good wine. Of course, neither one of them was affected much, because they took two hours to finish off the fifth, but they were feeling jovial.

Bob relieved my lookout watch at 12 noon and he was doing a little two-step as he approached the lookout. He always jigged a bit when he felt that way. He came down the plank walk laughing and I knew something was up! Upon entering the lookout his first words were, "Don't say a word about it, but Al and I found a bottle of Port in Crain's locker while doing sleeping room clean-up this morning. It was good stuff and we killed it all. Wait 'til Crain misses it!"

Crain did find out and was he mad! "Some son of a so-and-so swiped my wine!" said Crain that night at mess. "Just wait 'til I find out who did it. By God, they're going to be sorry!" Of course, Bob and Al had it over on him. Crain didn't dare to tell the Old Man about the theft, because liquor on Station premises was a big No-No!

Really, Al and Bob played a dirty trick on our poor cook. He never found out to his dying day who swiped it.

***

U.S. Coast Guard At South Manitou in the Late 20's

There have been drastic changes in personnel and Station equipment compared to what we had at South Manitou in the late 20's. Ship-to-shore radio and radar replaced the lookout watches and beach patrols.

Surfmen stood lookout watches 24-hours a day every day in the year. Our lookouts were equipped with telephones and we could contact the mainshore at any time. A surfman on lookout watch logged all vessels that steamed through the Manitou Passage. There were few diesel ships at that time. We were ever alert for any kind of distress signal from any vessel. With Stations at North Manitou and Sleeping Bear Point, the Manitou Passage was well covered from Cat Head Point to a few miles south of Sleeping Bear Point. There was a Light Ship anchored off the southern tip of North Manitou and they were always alert to a distress signal.

Beach patrols were also made from darkness 'til dawn. It was the duty of each patrolman to be alert to any distress signal he observed, especially in foul weather. Each patrolman carried Coston signals (flares), which could be fired to warn any vessel that seemed to be off course and near shallow water. They were also used to advise stranded vessels that they were sighted and help would be forthcoming.

We were proud of our patrol record, too. I can't recall an instance when a beach patrol was ever aborted because of foul weather. I have made patrols in blizzards, driving rain and sleet storms when gale winds drove ice water down one's neck. Many times, too. I encountered severe electrical storms that came ashore with severe wind squalls during the summer months. The patrolman faced the storms of all seasons and many times the going was

extremely difficult, but go we did in fair or foul weather. Certainly, there were the pleasant patrols during the summer months when moonlight bathed the beach and a gentle breeze ruffled the surface of Lake Michigan. Those were the enjoyable patrols when made under starlit skies with an offshore night wind filling the air with the fragrance of the woodlands.

Each day during the week drills were practiced. Signal drills included International flag drills, blinker light and wigwag and semaphore flag drills. Rules of the road and good seamanship were also stressed. Pulling surfboat drill was held every Tuesday, and on Thursday another boat drill plus the beach cart drill was scheduled. Resuscitation of the apparently drowned and the fire drill was held on Friday. Saturday was cleanup day. It was called scrub day by the crew. All station floors were scrubbed, windows washed if needed and brass polished on station boats. Also included were the copper tread mats on the steps leading to the second floor of the station. After the cleanup duties were performed our skipper made an inspection and invariably we were given the green light for a job well done.

Sunday was an off day for the crew. We wore our dress blues and took it easy. However, lookout watches and beach patrols were performed seven days a week.

There were always jobs to be done around our station and an able crew kept everything in perfect order. Our buildings, boats and equipment were always in top shape and beautiful to look at, thanks to a well-drilled crew and an able skipper.

***

Fog and the South Manitou Signal Station

Many times a "pea soup" fog would drift in over a calm lake at South Manitou. Then again it tumbled and scurried along before a brisk breeze. Somehow it gave us the feeling of being the only ones on the big lake. The mainshore was isolated, but we were snug and secure on our little island.

Many big freighters used the Manitou Passage in those days and for company, in foggy weather, we always had their deep-throated whistles. At times, as many as four or five vessels would be sounding as they passed the Island. When an up-bound vessel approached one down-bound, he emitted his three short blasts and then as the two vessels neared each other, they resorted to one long one, meaning of course, "I am directing my course to starboard." the other ship would answer with one blast. Often each vessel would continue the one blast serenade for several minutes, making sure that each skipper knew they were steering clear of the other vessel.

I always enjoyed the lookout watch during a heavy fog. The whistle music was enjoyable. And I am sure those skippers out there on that fog shrouded lake appreciated the sound of the big whistle on our Fog Signal Station, and knew they were abreast of South Manitou. There was no radar in those days.

Foggy days and nights were happy times when I often visited the Fog Signal Station. On chilly days it was always a warm, cozy place. The pleasant smell of steam and burning hardwood permeated the entire room. When John or Ray fired the boiler with four-foot lengths of beech or maple there was always a back draft of sweet smelling smoke. Then, too, there was always that soft hissing of steam around the big whistle. Conversations and story telling were cut short about every sixty seconds when that

big whistle cut loose with its eight-second blast, and then hissed steam a little louder after sounding. It always seemed to say, "How did you like that one?"

It was often a custom when a big steamer was close in to give him a salute. The big whistle was taken off the sounding cycle and three long and two short blasts were sent out across the lake. We listened and soon came the return salute from the freighter, another three longs and two shorts. It was a nice greeting and made one feel he was close to that fellow out in the channel who was groping his way through the gray fog. It was a good way to say, "Hi there, fellow."

Many times I recall those nights when I stood the lonesome watches in the lookout, and the visits at the Fog Signal Station, when heavy, deep fog covered the big lake. Remembering it all prompted me to write the following:

> The silent fog steals in and throws
> His misty cloak about the Light,
> Whose gallant beam throughout the night
> Has kept great ships upon their course.
> And now they're left alone to grope
> Their lonely way 'neath shrouded stars,
> While hoarse blasts from their whistles mar
> The gray-clad stillness of the night.

And …

> Someday when I am far inland
> Away from ships and fog, I'll
> Long to hear a steamer's whistle
> And know she's near. Or feel
> The fog's cool misty hand.

***

Remembering Jim Burdick

One of the best storytellers on the island when I was there was Jim Burdick, Keeper of the Light. He related vividly many stories about shipwrecks on the Island.

A short distance south of the little cemetery, near the old dock, there were several graves marked with old weather beaten wooden crosses. I asked Jim about them and he told me they were the graves of sailors whose bodies had washed ashore. They were unknown and their graves marked only with a wooden cross. The wooden crosses have now rotted back into the earth.

How I wish now that I had jotted down the stories that Jim told me. They were many.

South Manitou

Could I but set my course northward
Like the high flying geese,
Whose honking as they wing away,
Stir memories within me.
Could I alight on an icebound Island
Shore, and there await the Spring
With its fresh winds and blue skies.

I Remember …

… a late fall night, when the surf was pounding our sandy shore before a full gale, I climbed the Light that night with John Tobin and watched him light up. I was sitting in a chair and leaning back against the curving wall of the Light. Suddenly, I noticed a slight swaying motion. "Hey John," I exclaimed, "this lighthouse is moving a little! Is it going to blow over?"

"Steady as she goes, Crowner." he said. "She is out of balance if she doesn't move a little. When she stops moving then it's time to get out of here!"

I still didn't feel too good about the old Light's movement.

Upon Leaving

My transfer papers came in late October, and on November 1st my duties at South Manitou Station were terminated. My sea bag was packed and after bidding goodbye to all my friends on the Point, I boarded the old Lenore for the last time and August and I headed out for Glen Haven.

With a heart full of memories I watched South Manitou settle on the horizon. Gone were the good days and months I spent there. Gone were the crewmembers I knew so well.

A wave of sadness swept over me when I took a last look at South Manitou from the Glen Haven dock. Hopefully I would see it again – someday.

***

Remembering

I remember an Island, far out on the big lake, where fall storms sent breakers that crashed thunderously on the sandy shore; great crested waves that surged high, piling stones and driftwood in diverse patterns before they ebbed lakeward to join their fellows.

Then there were the calm days when the Island lay serenely beneath a warming sun. It was her resting time, with no turbulence to sway the trees and grasses. And the gull's cry drifted shoreward through the stillness of the early morn.

Often the fog crept in, shrouding the beautiful Light and muted the measured sound of the fog signal whistle. Big freighters steamed through the passage, sounding their three warning blasts and were answered by sister vessels. Then we were isolated and enjoyed the solitude that was ours.

South Manitou still remains a most beautiful Island, changing her dress with the four seasons; but from late fall 'til early spring it's a lonely place. It is so remote from her glory days when farmers tilled their fields and cared for their beautiful orchards. But time, relentless as it is, has taken its toll. Many of those hardy souls who labored there now rest peacefully in the little, well marked cemetery; names carved in the granite that only a few remember.

To this day the tree lined dirt roads still wend their way to the farmlands, but they only lead one past deserted homes, and fields that never again will feel the thrust of plows in the springtime.

I now cherish the memories of those yesterdays, days and months when there was kinship there and the big Light and the Coast Guard Station stood on the Point, and were manned by able crews. Gone, too, are the voices of friends we cherished.

Time's restless stride has erased all but the memories, but they still linger in one's heart.

***

Remembering – After 52 Years

Today I strolled along this
Lonely shore
Remembering other years
When as a youth my
Footsteps creased these
Very sands.
Eager steps they were, so
Full of life and love!

~~

The sun's bright beams slant
Earthward through an
Azure sky.
A wistful breeze coaxes
Little wavelets shoreward
To lap a million stones and
Make them gleam and
Sparkle in the sunshine.
Gulls send forth their
Lonely cry as they
Spiral gracefully over the
Blue waters.

~~

Today is just as beautiful,
Reminiscent of other
Days, but it isn't the same.
The long years have mellowed
The youthful stride.
Now I wander along the
Curving shoreline
Perhaps enjoying more the
Solitude of it all.

~~

Now I have time to remember,
Yes, to remember it all.
And over my soul creeps a
Gladness, akin to my
Youth, when I loved the
Gull's cry and the wave
Sounds on this
Beautiful Island.

***

The South Manitou Story

by Gerald E Crowner

A memoir of a young Coast Guardsman's first tour of duty as a surfman on South Manitou Island. Sometimes hilarious, sometimes heart-rending, Crowner's charming mix of narratives and poetry is pure entertainment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gerald Crowner was born in 1905 at Hart, a small town near the shores of "the Big Lake" on Michigan's west coast. His Grandfather was a U.S. Lifesaving Service Surfman at the Pentwater Station, just a few miles to the north. It was a time when the Great Lakes were still teaming with maritime traffic; a time when boys still daydreamed about going to sea and loitered around the waterfront, watching the big boats and worshiping the men who crewed them. True to the code, when missing, "the Crowner boy" could usually be found hanging around the Station in Pentwater.

In 1915, the Lifesaving Service became the U.S. Coast Guard. In 1920, at age 15, Gerry Crowner began his career with the Coast Guard, working summers as a "temporary Surfman." A couple of years later, the family moved south to Grand Haven, an important harbor town which eventually became known as "Coast Guard City, U.S.A." After graduating from High School and sampling a few other career opportunities, he impulsively and hastily enlisted in the Coast Guard in 1928 between Christmas and New Years Day, to capture the only opening available in the District – "island duty" at South Manitou Island. Thus began a life-long love affair with South Manitou.

His affection for the island and the people he knew there is reflected in these memoirs, which he put to paper just seven years before his death.

Gerald Crowner passed away during the Spring of 1989.

Personal Memoir
$14.95