



P.O. Box 177
Empire, Michigan 49630
November 2002

2001/2002 Vol. 13, No. 3

Membership Audit ...

Organizations are usually able to keep up-to-date membership records by recording dues payments. Since SMMS membership is free, the task is more of a challenge for us.

membership is. Can you take a moment right now to reaffirm your interest by returning the enclosed card, using the online form, or calling the following toll-free number?

www.southmanitou.org/members
1-877-842-7658

...and A Call for Comments

People once lived on South Manitou. For a 100-years, loggers, immigrant farmers, light-keepers and seamen called it "home". Children were born there. Old folks died. There were moments of great personal happiness and pride, and times of devastating tragedy and shame.

Those who were able left a hand, while others gave of their treasures, and in time the burial places were restored to their original state. The island is now a wilderness for the 100-year dead.

But things change. By the early 1950's, it was mostly left over. Life on the island had become extremely hard and lonely, many were lost in the shut-down. The Coast Guard left. The Post Office closed. There was little reason to remain, and most didn't. As the island's human history ended, its natural history resurged as the predominant force.

Within a few years, the South Manitou Memorial Society had materially accomplished its mission. The island was a wilderness again.

Thirty-five years passed. Then a small group of Island residents made a pact; they decided it was time to get together once a year at mid-summer to renew acquaintances and reminisce about the "good old days" on South Manitou. Some had relatives buried on the island and were abashed by the neglect. Grandparents had fallen into shameful states of disrepair. Inevitably, many were lost in the weeds. The group dedicated itself to recovering the island's cemeteries and outlying burial places, and seeing to their decent future maintenance. Each year thereafter they met at Empire and on the island.

Today, many of those who were most invested in that mission have passed. The island has a new mortality. It is a fact of human life. Moreover, we mortals are apt to remember our ancestors only through two generations, then their great abode only as names on tombstones, their graves unadorned by flowers and their rest unstartled by visitors.

The alternative would seem to be to adopt and pursue a new agenda focused on a more aggressive advocacy for South Manitou Island as a part of the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore, according to the purposes originally envisaged for the park, and in recognition of today's rapidly expanding need for retreats and recreational resources.

As a consequence of these realities, our original purposes have grown increasingly irrelevant to a broader segment of our membership, and we have experienced a natural drift towards expanding our mission to include the preservation and interpretation of the island's human history and cultural heritage.

The reality is that the National Park Service and other groups would doubtless meet such an agenda with staunch and powerful opposition. That has traditionally been the case. The significance of achievement and accomplishments would be a function of the Society's ability to apply the persuasive power of money and influence. This is also a reality of dealing with large-scale public entities. To succeed in this vein, we would therefore need to recruit a more affluent membership, achieve the involvement of influential and distinguished individuals, and develop highly successful fund-raising strategies. A challenging endeavor. To be sure!

Perhaps because the change occurred gradually and not artificially by design, this new agenda was never actually articulated, debated, officially adopted or otherwise recognized as a watershed in the life of the organization. A loose point was found

together once a year for a brief moment of camaraderie and remembrance. Unfortunately, the minimal attendance at this year's events suggests this limited agenda will not be sufficient to permit its continuation as a meaningful and financially viable entity.

Your feedback is important. While no action can be taken on such matters without a vote of the general membership, comments delivered in this mode are certain to have an impact upon the ultimate decision-making process.

The possibility of our formal dissolution therefore arises. In that case, our by-laws provide that if the assets of the Corporation are dedicated to the purchase and erection of a memorial honoring the former inhabitants of South Manitou Island, with any remainder given to the Park Service or another relevant non-profit organization in other words, we would have a \$40,000 statue... probably for the Island's Main Cemetery... then forever close our doors. This would be a fundamentally legitimate choice.

As you are reaffirming your interest in SMMS membership, use the opportunity to also make your thinking about the future of the organization known.

Authors - Copyright Holders

If you have ever published a book, have an unpublished work, or are the custodian of a copyright for a book about South Manitou, may we convert your work to an eBook?

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SMMS Newsletter Archive

Previous issues of the SMMS Newsletter are now available on the Web. The newsletters have been converted to HTML for quick downloading, and can therefore be viewed using your Web browser. If you're new to the Society, you can learn all about our history and past activities by browsing through this collection. Old timers will appreciate the opportunity to review and reminisce. This searchable archive contains unique essays about the Island's natural and human history and cultural traditions, and it therefore a great resource for writers and genealogical researchers!

So where do you stand? Is it time to fold up our tent, or roll up our sleeves? Are you willing to participate aggressively in a new agenda... or support it unenthusiastically? Is there a middle ground? Do you have opinions to share? Do you care one way or another?

The archive contains all but the original two issues (prior to 1990) of the newsletter, which have apparently been forever lost? (Got 'em? Call 877-842-7658.) See www.southmanitou.org/members/newsletters/

Synopsis of Minutes ...

GMP Sinks in Protest Storm

Our annual meeting was held at the Township Hall in Empire, Michigan on July 27, 2002. President Don Morris called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Approximately thirty members attended. Secretary John Carlson provided the official minutes of the 2001 meeting. A motion to accept the minutes as presented was offered, seconded and passed by the members present.

The plan in question was prepared under the stewardship of then Superintendent Ivan Miller. It was a first published and distributed in the fall of 1999, as a set of preliminary working proposals designed to engage the public in debate and comment, as required by law and park policy. The published document was rather highly polished and very nicely packaged; perhaps that was its Achilles heel... it didn't look very preliminary...

Treasurer Joe Orbeck provided a report on the Society's financial situation as of June 30, 2002. Acceptance of this report was moved, seconded and passed.

Most recipients focused on the word "plan" rather than "preliminary" and "alternatives". Few liked anything they saw, and storms of protest quickly began to gather. Before it was all over, county governments, state agencies and executives, congressmen, newspapers, a broad array of non-profit organizations, and hundreds of individuals were writing letters, voting resolutions, publishing articles and making phone calls.

Don Morris presented an update on the SLBE General Management Plan Alternatives, on where the process was at, and the formulation of a response from SMMS. A discussion of issues affecting South Manitou Island ensued, including concerns about the wilderness designation, roads and trails, preservation of historic structures on the island, and access to the western dunes.

Finally, Congressmen Dave Camp (R-Midland), Peter H. Hoekstra (R-Idaho) and U.S. Governor Dick Postlewaite gathered up on Dan Smith at the NPS and Craig Manson at the Department of Interior. The response of the Federal officials was, "It has been determined that the best course of action at this time is to withdraw the plan and cease (GMP) development processes for an undetermined amount of time."

The new SMMS brochure and Web site were introduced. The Web address is www.southmanitou.org. Locations where the brochure is, and could be distributed were discussed.

This came as a surprise to local park officials, who apparently had not tracing their bosses in Washington were about to warm the shirt. At that moment, new Superintendent Dusty Shultz had no comment other than, "We'll just wait until we get some direction from the Department of Interior."

The membership was alerted to presently vacant volunteer positions and opportunities. The vacant positions are Newsletter Editor and Picnic Organizer. An upcoming volunteer opportunity involves paring the interior of the South Manitou Island schoolhouse.

In a subsequent note, Ms Shultz wrote about the nature of the NPS planning process, and assured, "Things shouldn't really stay in the forefront of our minds."

The meeting ended with an announcement regarding the Island Outing planned for the next day, being officially adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

You care deeply for the rich heritage and resources of this area... You are fiercely dedicated to ensuring that these precious resources are available for the enjoyment of all future generations, regardless of age or disability... You project the strongest sense of community in the preservation and protection of the resources so that you, your grandchildren and your great grandchildren can all enjoy the island's rich and memorable experiences of this special place.

July 2002 Meeting

We also share your love of this national treasure. (For the full text of the note, please see planing.dci.nps.gov; search term: "sleeping bear".)

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Meanwhile, the "plan" has disappeared from the NPS Planning Website.

Treasurer Joe Orbeck provided a report on the Society's financial situation as of June 30, 2002. Acceptance of this report was moved, seconded and passed.

Dec & Harvey Rocheleau, SMMS Volunteers, roll up their sleeves on the Island!

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Dec and Harvey Rocheleau, SMMS Members, volunteered their time on South Manitou Island for four days following our Annual Island Outing this year.

Kathy Bietau visited on the update on the outlying gravestone project. Offering to the sites in June, volunteers found that poison ivy and encroaching vegetation prevented access to several sites. An environmental assessment might be necessary to clear paths to these sites. That document would need to be written by the National Park before our group could volunteer to clear and mark these paths.

After cleaning the porch on the village and Mike Smith in the marigold, they built a 10-foot extension to the main building from the existing fence at the Main Cemetery. Then they cleared weeds from around the cemetery perimeter and around rare trees inside.

The new SMMS brochure and Web site were introduced. The Web address is www.southmanitou.org. Locations where the brochure is, and could be distributed were discussed.

Meanwhile, the camera also found NPS maintenance personnel beginning demolition work at the historic SMMS schoolhouse in preparation of a complete interior restoration. But wait...!

The membership was alerted to presently vacant volunteer positions and opportunities. The vacant positions are Newsletter Editor and Picnic Organizer. An upcoming volunteer opportunity involves paring the interior of the South Manitou Island schoolhouse.

What's that thing in the corner... an indoor PRY'ER? (That's not 'matre').

The meeting ended with an announcement regarding the Island Outing planned for the next day, being officially adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

Synopsis by Kathy Bietau

It's not too late. It's never too late. Think about helping and activities. Contributions can be made anytime, in any amount, and as often as you like. Pay online using your check or credit card, or you may mail your check or money order to PO Box 177 in Empire.

Those of you who have not ventured to South Manitou and since September will be surprised to see a welcome addition to the Lighthouse Complex... and something missing from behind the U.S. Life-Saving Station building. Thanks to the volunteer efforts by Link construction and Jim Lake, Michigan, the round and metal Flammable Storage Building is again on its original site between the Lighthouse and the Fog Whistle Building.

Back when I was hired to teach in the Island's little one-room schoolhouse, she boarded in the home of the School Board's President, August Warner. She developed a very close relationship with August and Rosie Warner even before it became a requirement for all future teachers-in-laws. During the time we lived in Traverse, she took us over to the Island as often as she could find a reason for going. Late in 1944, she found herself carrying a third child, who would be born early in the summer of 1945. In June, she took us over to the Island for what would prove to be our last visit. My sister and I lived with our grandparents on the Island for the rest of that summer.

The park and visitors have both been anticipating when the metal Flammable Storage Building would be returned to its original location. Last year local contractors did some site cleanup and set out a concrete and cultural resource office set out to see if any original remains of the building. Upon looking at historic photographs and surveying the site, it was discovered that the building had been built on a mound of sand over the original foundation. After removing the shrub and sand, we discovered a brick lined concrete pad outlining where the building once stood.

Unfortunately, our tenure as a next-generation Island family abruptly ended only a few months after my birth.

Park mason Bill Love, with assistance from Ben Davis and Michigan Works students from Zion County, repaired the pad so it could again support the structure. The site was made ready for Link Construction to relocate the structure to its original location. The building and building to the site was the easy part... especially after discovering the correct center of gravity and balancing the right amount of weights on the isolation tractors being used. The hard part was positioning the structure on top of the original foundation with precisely the exact placement. It needed to be properly aligned with the sidewalk, with the door opening and rings on the pad properly positioned with respect to the interior shelves. All of this was completed in only a few days. The amount of work we had originally estimated the work would take only a few hours, we found that it took a full day to perfect and complete each step!

My dad ("Low" in Grandpa's book) had joined the Coast Guard in 1927. He was a first-class fireman and at the Lifboat Station at Sleeping Bear. Up to that point, he had probably never been more than a few miles away from home. In the spring of 1941, he and most other local fishermen were called as part of the special force to staff several Lifboat Stations, leaving the local stations to only a skeleton crew. He was later transferred to convey escort duty in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, aboard a Coast Guard-operated destroyer escort, USS Swidge (DE-386). Although he did not come home once or twice, I don't remember ever laying eyes on my father until he returned after the end of the war, in the summer of 1946. I was going on six-years old.

My mother, on the other hand, did not drink... at least that was her official position. She often claimed, "I don't have to drink to have fun." (But she had more fun when she did.) On occasions such as New Years Eve, she might agree to a "highball" (or two.) She originally came to the Island as a schoolteacher, so that night, some might have expected that sort of propriety, although she was not a drinker. She was a very capable. In fact, she had inherited a somewhat puritanical attitude from her mother, a strict German Evangelical Lutheran. By her strange-faced behavior (she was naturally suited to her role as schoolteacher, and some fifteen years later she would return to college, earn a degree, and eventually retire after about twenty years in that profession.

When he was called for sea duty, Dad insisted on moving his family from South Manitou Island to Grand Haven. I'm not sure why. Maybe it was because his sister Anne lived there, and would be able to keep an eye on us. His Uncle Harrison (Haas), another island boy, had also been the Chief and deputy chief of the Coast Guard Lifboat Station, and my father had been a familiar with him. On the other hand, it might have been to keep us away from my mother's side of the family, the Kelderhouses, who lived on the mainland at Port Onedia and Glen Arbor.

Under those circumstances, at the time of my conception my dad would most likely have been "drunk". During the winter of 1941, he and his wife and stuffs always made him ill, rarely rendering him unconscious. Thus, he usually avoided it. He compensated for that character flaw by consuming beer voraciously. Whenever anyone came to visit, he would immediately fetch a beer to put me never bothering his guests with a choice. Growing up on the Island had apparently taught him that such a question was superfluous, possibly even inopportune. Moreover, whenever he went visiting, it was always with a "six-pack" of two under his arm. He was always true to his island heritage in this respect.

But our hearts were, not in Grand Haven. After a short sojourn, my mother, against my father's wishes and much to his ire, moved us back "up north"... to a little house at 623 South 8th Street in Traverse City.

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