



Manitou Islands Archives Newsletter

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Newsletter

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Manitou Islands Archives?

ManitouIslandsArchives.Org was officially established on Sunday, October 5, 2008. Its purpose is to preserve knowledge of Michigan's Manitou Passage, by serving as a repository for information regarding the history and cultural traditions of its pioneering settlers and homesteaders, and by making that information readily available and easily accessible to everyone via the Internet.

The Manitou Passage was important for a brief 100-year era, in much the same way as various points along the old Oregon Trail and other routes into the American West. In the early nineteenth century, the U.S. Government began encouraging westward expansion by recruiting European immigrants. With the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862, immigration boomed.

Most newcomers entered through the Port of New York. Many found their way into the west by traveling overland to St. Louis, there becoming outfitted to join professionally guided wagon trains for long and arduous journeys into the frontier. By virtue of numerous movies and television "westerns," we are all well familiar with wagon train sagas.

But many others traveled by water, sailing up the Hudson River, boating through the canal system from Albany to Buffalo, then sailing the Great Lakes to Chicago. For whatever



reasons, producers have never seemed to appreciate the romance and adventure associated with these pioneers, so there have been no films or serial television dramas about this gateway into the west. Therefore, few are familiar with its story.

Lake Michigan's northeastern island archipelago was important to these voyages, since the

islands provided shelter from storms and angry seas, and later, plenty of wood to refuel steamboats. The Manitou Islands and mainland ports in the Manitou Passage were the last stop for ships bound for Chicago. South Manitou, the southernmost

island in the chain, offered a large bay which provided a perfect natural harbor, ideal as a refuge and for a final "wooding" before continuing with the final leg of the voyage to Chicago. South Manitou, for many years, therefore served as the center of maritime activity in the Passage.

Over the 100-year span from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, life on the islands and Manitou Passage mainland evolved in response to technological advances and economic realities.

The cultures evolved from maritime support, to fishing and farming, to resort and tourism. At the end of that sequence, the area became a National Lakeshore.

There were never any natural events of catastrophic proportions here, or famous battles on land or sea. The Manitou Passage is therefore little more than a footnote in history books, if

indeed mentioned at all. Its history and cultural traditions are recorded in the hearts of the families whose ancestors immigrated and settled here; in old photographs, essays and sometimes published memoirs. But as young ancestors move away to find better opportunities for easier lives elsewhere, and as physical artifacts of life here began to fall into disrepair and eventually disappear, many of the stories began to fade and die.

Luckily, the National Park Service then entered the picture, eventually adopting a preservation agenda, followed by a few nonprofit partners with a supportive mission. Much information was collected, including oral histories from remaining old timers. Much of it, however, has wound up in files and storage places, available only to visiting scholars and others persistent enough eventually win access.

The purpose of ManitouIslandsArchives.Org is to make collections of such material permanently available to everyone. If you of in possession of material that might be useful to others in illuminating the history and cultural traditions of the Manitou Passage area, ManitouIslandsArchives.Org is eager to help you share it. Please get in touch, and let's talk about how to make that happen. ■





The Crown Jewel

The South Manitou Island lighthouse was decommissioned in 1958, and has been dark over the past fifty years. That era ended on Friday, October 26. That evening, the Lakeshore flipped the switch on a new beacon system, and the light shown again for a brief hour of so for test purposes. Cell phones squawked from the island; “Can you see me now?” And from Glen Haven came the replies “Yes, we can see it! We can see it!”

Some time after the light’s decommissioning, it’s spare fresnel lens was loaned for display, and knowledge of its location eventually was lost. The primary lens was later destroyed by vandals who evidently got a kick out of dropping segments of it off the top of the tower and watching them smash on the pavement below. The light beamed through the above acrylic plastic replica, created by ArtWorks Florida in Orlando, at a cost upwards of \$69,000. The cost of the whole project is about \$93,000. \$40,500 has been funded by a NPS “Centennial Challenge” grant. The remaining \$52,500 must be raised from other sources. Of that, a loan of \$22,500 could possibly be converted to a grant, and perhaps upwards of \$17,000 in cost items converted to donations. ■

Film Conversions?

A Port Oneida family wishes to share several years’ worth of 16mm home movies, much of it including film of Port Oneida life and events, plus images of Port Oneida people at their homes and farmsteads. Some of the film is sixty-years old, so care in cleaning, handling and processing as an important concern.

The going rate for frame-by-frame conversion is about 18¢ per foot, and there may be over 2500 feet in this collection. Another concern is that a large portion of the content is evidently of unrelated matter. Our aim is to re-master the relevant content on MiniDV tape for permanent archiving at the Lakeshore, and producing MPEG (or etc.) content for the website.



This would be a great volunteer or intern project for students involve with a college media lab. Meanwhile, the Internet is full of “transfer mills” and divergent opinion. If you have experience or expertise in this area, you are invited to share it. Please get in touch. ■

Tobin Burial on South Manitou?

Bonnie (Caron) Bellmer says that her cousin Keith (Tobin) Cameron was just a small boy when his father Edwin was killed in an automobile accident in Glen Haven seventy years ago. Keith and his family are now hoping that when the time comes, his urn can be placed by his father’s grave in the South Manitou Island cemetery, and are seeing an approval from the Lakeshore.



According to a recent survey, Edwin has lain alone in the cemetery’s Tobin family plot, our having found no other burials within its boundary markers. It would therefore seem fitting that if he were joined in his last resting place by his son.

For those who might be interested, the 1989 Lakeshore’s burial policy for the South Manitou cemetery may be found in the genealogy section on the ManitousIslandsArchives.Org website. ■

Newsletter Submissions

Do you have an item or information that might be of interest to others? Submit it from the newsletter index page on the ManitousIslandsArchives.Org website ■