

Appendix B - Brief History of the Area

There are several book and web sites with historical information about Misery Bay and the Thunder Bay Group. A recently published book by Steve Tongue provides a detailed history of Thunder Bay Island, the lighthouses and life saving station.. Steve Tongue serves as historian for the Thunder Bay Island Preservation Society.

While "magnificent in its desolation" today, Thunder Bay Island has a significant legacy:

- *The second oldest lighthouse still standing on Lake Huron
- *A lifesaving station which assisted in the rescue of over 1000 lives
- *A coast littered with the remains of ill-fated shipwrecks
- *A fishing colony that was home to Alpena's earliest settlers
- *Legends of ghosts and the mysterious currents that draw ships to their destruction
- *Rocks carved with the names of the many who served on and visited the island for over 150 years
- *Rare plant and animal life drawn to its unique "alvar" ecosystem

These are a few of the many fascinating stories told in *Lanterns and Lifeboats*. Beginning with the voyage of the *Griffin* in 1679, Thunder Bay Island has provided shelter along "Huron's rockbound shore," and its story mirrors our rich Great Lakes maritime heritage. *Lanterns and Lifeboats* connects the history "above the water line" with the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary's latest efforts to preserve and interpret the bay's rich underwater archaeology.

The book is available from the Thunder Bay Island Preservation Society (TBIPS) at P.O Box 212, Alpena, MI 49707. Please send a check for \$14.95 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling. All proceeds of book sales go towards restoration efforts of the TBIPS

Another very interesting book is history by itself. **"Complete History - Alpena County, Michigan," a book written by: William Boulton in 1876.**¹ Excerpts from the book are posted below. The book can be viewed in its entirety on the internet by either typing "History of Alpena" in most web search engines or going to the web site:

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Acres/1947/completehistoryofalpenaco.html>

Early History [Pages 1 -8]

In 1840, Mr. J.W. Paxton landed on Thunder Bay Island, and in 1842 Mr. O.S. Warner paid a visit to the Indians at the mouth of Thunder Bay River, for the purpose of trading with them. Mr. Paxton engaged extensively in gill-net fishing about the year 1856. Soon after he purchased Sugar Island, and removed his fishing, rig and buildings thereto in 1858. Mr. Paxton has remained a settler ever since, and was the first to make gill-net fishing a regular business. Fishing prior to that time had been carried on by means of six or eight nets in a gang, and small, sprit-sail boats. There was a light-house on Thunder Bay Island at the time of Mr. Paxton's arrival, but it was not the present magnificent structure, built in 1857.

¹ "Complete History" Alpena County, Michigan, Written by: William Boulton, 1876. Entered according to Act of Congress on the 2d day of June 1876, by William Boulton, In the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington. Alpena: Argus Book and Job Rooms, 1876

Geographical [Pages 30 - 33]

About a mile eastward from Alpena City is Trowbridge Point, once a flourishing depot for the lumber sawed at the mills some few miles up the river, and close to it is a small bay, known as Norwegian bay. A little further out is Whitefish Point, named from the abundance of white-fish that sported there, but now scarce, and passing along by the fisheries of Old Harvey Williams, Plough and Campbell, (the last two the best in the bay,) we come to North Point, and also to the outskirts of the bay.

From the water, a little way out from North Point, we have an admirable view of the shores of Alpena county; to the south is South Point and the south shore of the bay, plain to view as regards the general outlook of the land, but too far off to distinguish individual objects plainly. To the westward we can dimly observe the smoke of Alpena city, and make out the general contour of the land. Out in the blue waters of Lake Huron are the pretty group of islands known as Sugar, Thunder Bay and Gull Islands. These islands are distant about two miles from North Point, Sugar Island being the nearest. Sugar Island contains over 100 acres of land; it is the property of John Paxton, and is the site of some of the most flourishing gill net fisheries in the State. Thunder Bay Island is owned by United States Government, and on it is situated the light house, known as Thunder Bay Light. Gull Island is a small island owned by Frank Jennings, and is used during the summer as a gill net fishery, this island is north of the other two, and receives its name from the amount of gulls that frequent it. Close by North point, to the southward, is the reef on which the propeller Galena was wrecked in 1872. This reef is well known, and is out of the way of vessels entering the bay, so that there is not the least necessity for vessels coming to grief upon it. Close by the same place the Propeller Congress was burned some years ago. Looking to the northward, the remaining shores of Alpena stand out boldly and plainly to view, it appearing to jut out in regular steps. The course of the shore to Alpena and up the lake, varies but little, being about northwesterly and forming a peninsula about ten miles long and eight miles wide.

As we journey up the shore, we pass North Point gill net fisheries, Little Thunder Bay, Crooked Island Misery Point. In Little Thunder Bay and well to the northwest of it, is a curious freak of nature. It consists of a deep hole some one or two hundred feet in diameter, and a depth according to a sounding made by us, of 79 feet. It is full of water and is supposed to be the outlet of Sunken Lake, some thirty miles distant from the shore. Prof. Winchel, who examined it, believes in this theory. In passing over this sunken hole, a person experiences a feeling as if the bottom had dropped out, leaving him suspended in the air. The sides appear to go straight down, and as far as can be seen, are covered with weeds, amid which large pike find a secure hiding place. It is affirmed that this hole never freezes over.

Further to the north are SanHook and Nine Mile Point, and beyond these can be seen Middle Island and Presque Isle Point. - The line of upper lake steamboats and vessels pass about five miles from this shore, and it is nothing infrequent to see in sight at one time, from 30 to 40 steamboats, tugs and sailing vessels. At Nine Mile point is situated Morris' dock, from which a large amount of cedar posts, house blocks, and telegraph poles have been shipped to other ports.

Between Middle Island and Thunder Bay Island, is the reef on which whitefish cast their spawn every year. During the spawning season, the fish in countless numbers swarm about the rocky

bottom, and hundreds of barrels of them get entangled in the gill nets, which extends in all directions along the reef, thus become the prize of the fishermen. The depth of water on the reef averages about seven fathoms, although at one point the water is only four fathoms. The reef is about five miles from shore.

Fishing [pages 37 - 39]

Fishing is carried on by means of trap nets and gill nets. The trap net grounds are inside the bay, the best places being Campbell's fishery, Plough's fishery and Sulphur Island. The gill net grounds lie off the coast a distance of from five to ten miles. The number of rigs employed in fishing varies every year, but they number generally, about ten trap nets and ten or twelve gill net rigs. The yearly catch will average between four and five thousand barrels, worth at least \$30,000. Lately a large business has sprung up in the fresh fish line - the fish being packed in ice in Alpena, and then shipped to various points below. The most convenient sites for the gill net boats are on North Point, Sugar Island and Gull Island. The best fishing season is during the fall, when the fish come on the various reefs to spawn, but the reckless catching at such times has sensibly diminished the number of fish. The principal fish sought after are the whitefish and trout, and of these fish, the State Commission in their official report for 1873-4 state as follows:

*The Whitefish (*Coregonus albus*) is undeniable the most valuable fresh water variety found on the continent. Its geographical range in the United States extends from Lake Ontario through all the great lakes to the head waters of Lake Superior, whilst a few are found in some of the inland lakes of New York and Michigan, and they are reported in limited numbers in a very few of the lakes of Wisconsin and Minnesota. For the purposes, however, of home consumption, as well as for commerce, the great chain of lakes affords the only field of supply. These lakes in former years, and even now after years of improvidence and waste, produce millions annually. Yet the catch is very appreciably diminishing, to the evident alarm of the States that border on the lakes, and of the country at large. The causes of this decrease are too transparent for enumeration or designation. The simple mention of the naked fact opens a volume replete with bitter recollections and reproof. Avarice, human greed, regards neither the times nor the modes of capture, and ignorance is their stupid associate and ally. Decay and famine even ever have followed, and ever will follow in the footsteps of such a co-partnership.*

The size and quantity of the fish vary in different waters. In their more northern habitat at Sault Ste Marie (the outlet of Lake Superior) they average four pounds, and in the head waters of Lake Superior they have been reported caught weighing high as fifteen pounds! While from the more southern lakes of the chain their average will not exceed two or three pounds. The quality of the fish, too, is believed to vary in different waters - those on the north shores of the lakes and in the higher latitudes being regarded superior to those in lower latitudes, owing, as it is said, to the cold spring streams that debouch in the lakes on the north side, and to the constantly colder water produced by a higher latitude.

A minute description of this fish is hardly necessary, as nearly every resident of Michigan is familiar with this most excellent and popular fish. In general terms it may be stated its back is of a grayish color, the rest is beautiful white, and when emerging from the water, of most lustrous appearance. Head small as contrasted with its body, and when approaching the spawning period, the head is thought to decrease in size, imparting to the fish almost a deformed look. The spawning period is from middle to late autumn. Their natural resort is in deep water, except during the spawning season, when they take to the shoal water for the

deposition of their spawn. The number in certain localities and at certain seasons, being so greatly in excess of their number in the same localities at other seasons has led some into the belief that they are of a migratory habit. The great bulk of them retiring to the upper lakes during the spring and summer, and leaving for the lower lakes as the generation season arrives. This claim, however, of a migratory habit or disposition, is by no means clearly established. The Whitefish is a large but careless breeder, so that in the absence of artificial appliance to rescue the ova from the hydra mouths that lie in wait for their destruction, but comparatively small results come from its prolific habit. The young are extremely active, and incline to deep water, thereby escaping the attacks of predaceous fish, and of numerous other enemies that are accustomed to glut their appetites and regale their native depravity in shoal waters.

On the subject of the food of the Whitefish there exists quite a diversity of opinion. They being neither predatory nor carnivorous feeders, the better judgment seems to be that their food is of vegetable origin - the product of aquatic plants, insects, and jelly-like crustacea. Their peculiar conformation and structural organism, their know habits, and the quality of their meat, go to substantiate this view. Nothing has ever been found in the intestines of the Whitefish that would establish in any degree their relation to the predaceous or carnivorous family; hence the inference, supported by observation, is to the effect that their food is of vegetable origin, water insects, the offshoot of aquatic plants, and different forms of crustacea. The food of the young fish, too, soon after hatched, must be the infusoria of the water, that microscopic animalcula life with which every drop of water teems when brought into certain conditions, one of which conditions is the presence of aquatic plants and vegetable growth. This view accords with the teachings of instinct, for the parent fish invariably seeks the shoal waters for the deposition of their spawn, where there is usually an abundance of aquatic plants and minute insect life, instinct so directing and assuring them that in such place or places will their offspring on emerging to life find the food adapted to their delicate and tender constitutions. The young carries a sac the same as other members of the Salmonidae family which is soon absorbed, lasting them generally from seven to ten days. This yolk sac of the Whitefish, unlike that of the Trout or Salmon, from the hour they dash away the house of their birth, seems to offer no perceivable resistance to their agile movements.

The Whitefish is not in the common acceptance of the term a game or fly fish. Not but what they may have been caught with the line and rod, but if so caught there was a double mistake, the fish and the angler both counting, in sporting parlance, on a "scratch," for the fish did not intend to be so caught, nor did the angler make his cast in any expectation of such result. They are pure and simple a net or seine fish.

Perhaps the next fish in importance, indigenous to Michigan waters, are the Lake trout - known under the various names, Mackinac Trout, Salmon Trout, Namaycush, Salmo Siskawitz, and even these do not exhaust the nomenclature. These several varieties, differing in size, coloring, and general appearance, are without any very great structural differences, and are undoubtedly congeneric, all being of lacustrine habitat and habits, and non-migratory, they rarely ever entering any of the rivers for the purpose of spawning or in quest of food. The Namaycush, or Great Lake Trout, attain in some waters to great size, while its brother, the Siskawitz, and other lake trout, as a general thing, are of considerably less size, - size, appearance, and other conditions depending very much on locality, depth, and temperature of water. The spawning season is in autumn, October being the fish culturist's best harvest month. As the generation period arrives, they approach the shores for the deposition of the spawn, seeking out the

gravelly shoals of the lake, and are not infrequently seen in those narrow gravelly channels between the many islands that fringe the shores of the great lakes.

The spawn of the lake trout may be obtained by the artificial methods, and about the same processes of incubation obtain as with the ova of the members of the Salmondæ class. The lake trout are a very acceptable and valuable table fish, already supplying a large home consumption; while as an article of commerce they rank very high. Fish dealers have informed us that they are more easily kept in good condition during the warm seasons and bear transportation better than almost any other variety. This species, it is believed, may be successfully introduced into all the larger and better class of our inland lakes where they will find water of ample depth and food in sufficient supply to warrant the experiment of their culture. Besides the above we have pickerel, bass, sturgeon, herring, suckers "lawyer" and a number of others.

According to the "Thunder Bay Island Web Site"
<http://www.geocities.com/thunderbayisland/index.html>

Taken from the "Archaeological Survey of the Commercial Fisheries, Life-Saving Station, and Lighthouse Complex on the Thunder Bay Island Group, Lake Huron, MI" by Erin Williams, Michigan State University

The Thunder Bay Island Group is located east of Alpena, Michigan. Thunder Bay, Sugar, and Gull Islands lay approximately three miles off the coast and thirteen miles out of Alpena Harbor. Thunder Bay Island was set aside for Federal Government use as a Lighthouse preserve more than twenty years prior to the time the land was first surveyed in 1854. The first lighthouse on the island was established in 1832, thus beginning an era of white habitation on the island group.

Fishermen and women settled on Thunder Bay Island twenty years before a survey party arrived to layout the Village of Fremont (later Alpena).

Fisheries of Thunder Bay, Sugar, and Gull Islands were among the most productive on Lake Huron during the nineteenth century. Fish caught and processed were sold as far south as Bay City, Saginaw and going as far as the eastern sea board. These fishing communities also contributed greatly to the settlement of Michigan's frontier and the foundation of the county of Alpena.

Thunder Bay Island was the site of several Alpena Counties "firsts." These included: first white settlers, first house constructed, first store, first school, first birth, the list would be endless since almost every "first" act could be attributed to those early fishing communities. The Island Group was integral to bringing people to the region. As early settlers of the region, the fishermen and women stories provided information to future coastal settlers. They watched the mainland develop from a few settlers at the mouth of a river to a full service harbor.

The number of individuals involved in the Island Group's commercial fisheries reached its peak between 1840 and 1860. It is known from historic accounts that around 1848 - 1849, approximately 300 individuals were present in the Thunder Bay Island fishing communities.

Then came the U.S. Life-Saving Service Lifeboat Station which was established in 1876. It was constructed in the location of prior fishing sites. This station was one of the first five stations established on Lake Huron after their construction was authorized by an 1874 Act. The Life-Saving service joined with the Revenue-Marine Service to establish the U.S. Coast Guard in 1915. The Lighthouse Service was added to the U.S. Coast Guard in 1939. The last log book for the Thunder Bay surfboat station ended in August of 1941. The concrete walkways that had once connected the different structures are all that remains. Artifacts can be found among the minor debris. The U.S. Coast Guard remained on the Island until 1983 when the light became automated. Below is a navigational map from 1913, note the location of lighthouse, life saving station on Thunder Bay Island and fish houses on North Point.

