

Collection of Items on Little Harbor and Thompson

Compiled by Alex Meron 1979-85

This is a collection of items found in old papers, written by old timers of Manistique and area, and from published items of the area for special occasions.

Perhaps all are not historically correct but to preserve what little we have all was included in this collection, that came to my attention.

LITTLE HARBOR, Schoolcraft County: this sawmill settlement on Lake Michigan, in Thompson Township, was given a post office on Feb. 18, 1888, with Alfred A. Tracy as its first postmaster; the office was closed on Oct. 31, 1888, but was restored from June 9, 1906, to May 14 1910. (GSM 1889-1911; PO Archives & taken from Michigan Place Names by Walter Romig, L.H.D.

This is a story written for the Schoolcraft Historical Society at the time it was called the Pioneer Historical Society, about 1924.

"Mr. Marble, will you kindly give to our local Historical Society the story of Little Harbor as you remember it?"

"Well, Sir, that was a long time ago. The beginnings of Little Harbor. In 1875, before I was born, of course, my father and grandfather thought that the timber had about all disappeared from the Lower Peninsula. Especially around their home at Frankfort and Manistee, the famous Crystal Lake Area. So, about 1875 they began coming up to the Upper Peninsula in the winter to prospect for prime timber. Prospecting for timber is an unknown term these days; but, it was the same as miners who went prospecting for gold or silver. So, they prospected and hunted up virgin tracts or sections of pine timber. Principally, they worked around the Whitefish River and Rapid River. They built a permanent camp at the forks of the Whitefish River near Gladstone and close to Rapid River. From this permanent camp, they would take long forays into the wilderness with their maps and try to locate these virgin tracts of pine. In order that other timber prospectors or timber estimators for the big mills and logging companys would not know or be aware of their activities, and thus try and beat them to these tracts of timber, they pretended to be trappers and they were trappers in fact; because, they set their traps and had their one night stands away from the main camp where they would be gone several days along these routes that had a little lean-to to stay in overnight. As they would find these beautiful tracts of pine timber, they would find the corners and survey and estimate the timber and then when the break-up came in the spring, they would go to the land office in Lansing and find out who the owners of these pieces of timber were that they had found. Then they would go to the owners who perhaps never saw and hardly knew where their timber tracts were, would get a price on it, give an option and then they would go back to the loggers or the saw mills on the Rapid River, the Whitefish

and the Tacoosh and try to sell these sections of timber, which they did very successfully.

My fathers' name was Webster Lansing Marble and my grandfathers' name was Lansing Marble. The camp that they had at the forks of the Whitefish at the Rapids is still called the Marble Rapids.

Twenty years later, after they had abandoned the camp, my father took me on a river trip and we camped inside of the ruins of the old camp. Twenty years later, my father took my brother on the same trip. They tented out at this same location. Twenty years later, I took my son on the Whitefish River trip and camped as near as we could tell where the old camp had been.

During these trips up here in the Upper Peninsula which my father and grandfather made, they discovered the beautiful Little Bay south of Thompson on Lake Michigan. It is an ideal harbor. Something the shape of Cape Cod and they thought that it would be a wonderful place to start a saw mill and a saw mill town."

"Mr. Marble, do you recall whether the present name of that lovely little harbor was called at the time Little Harbor or did your father name it."

"Well Sir, I wouldn't know about that because I was only five years old when we went there. A lot of the details at the time did not seem important to me or the years following, so I wouldn't know; but presumably, it was called that by the explorers and the Indians and it was the name of the town after my father came there and started the town he called it Little Harbor."

Mr fathers' uncle was a Great Lakes engineer and so dad got him to buy two barges and some scows and together they established the little village of Little Harbor. My uncle's name was Daniel Webster Chipman of Milwaukee. They built a complete town. The homes, boarding house, general store, blacksmith and wagon shop and then the sawmill. Of course, they had to build a dock which they called "piers." the piers were made by building what a simple explanation is maybe a dozen or so of little log cabins, ten or twelve feet square, the logs all notched together at the ends and held together by long iron rods. The bottom was logs all fastened together. These were towed out into the lake at regular intervals and from the scows they were loaded with rocks and sunk. Then the long logs and timbers were laid on and the sawmill was then operationg and huge planks were laid across the beams and that is the way the piers were built. The lumber was hauled out in wagons and loaded onto the barge or if it was a large barge, it would be loaded onto the scows and hauled out with a tug to a large barge or steamer. The main of the lumber was taken to the cities, Milwaukee, Chicago or along Lake Michigan.

Little Harbor was started in 1885. By 1887, a great deal of timber had been taken out and cut into lumber. At that time, the summer of 1887, there was a panic; so, there was no market for timber. The bottom had dropped out of the market and it didn't look for several years that it would pay to manufacture timber. Times

were so tight, the banks wouldn't loan any more money; so, my father and uncle pulled out of town. Abandoned it for some time; but, later on, William Bonifas, the famous logger and called "Big Bill", he took over and established a logging business there. I don't think that he built a mill because everything was taken away by my father and uncle. Everything was moved out except the houses and sold; but, that's Little Harbor. The timber business that was the beginning of Bonifas' fortune. Later, he moved to Gladstone on the "bluff" and was the first logger to get lumber off of that what is now and earlier called the Plains on the top of Gladstone Bluff."

"Mr. Marble, when I first came into the Upper Peninsula in 1921, we went swimming at Little Harbor and I remember distinctly that the cribs or the piers, which you spoke about, were still there at that time. There was also the remnants of the old sidewalk. Some of the houses and a large smoke stack had fallen down but the footings of the mill were still there. That would be about thirty-five years after your father left Little Harbor."

"Well, Sir, some of the background of Little Harbor I should mention. The people who ran the boarding house were my mother's father and her mother. Their name was Mr. & Mrs. William F. Berry. They came from Frankfort also. They went to Little Harbor at the time we did and Mr. Berry was my grandfather and he was a scaler for the mill. The wagon maker was Martin Conklin. The point that curved around the south side of the Harbor out into Lake Michigan, was called "Coles Point." The Coles moved to Gladstone about the time we did and quite a number of the family are still there. As a relic of Little Harbor, it is no doubt, almost unbelievable to people, that I still have a pair of mocassins made in 1886 for me by an Indian squaw who lived on Coles Point.

Most of the boys in those days wore mocassins in the winter time as did all the cruisers, sometimes called land lookers, because they were easy to wear on snowshoes and feet could be kept dry. At that time, rubber boots and shoe packs of today and leather-top rubbers were unknown. So mocassins made of buckskin were the things that people wore in the woods.

An incident of the Little Harbor days that stands out very partially in my mind was when a deer was driven into the water of the harbor by dogs and it swam out into the bay. My father and another man got a rowboat to go out and get it as there was no law at that time as to when you could kill a deer. He had his rifle with him. He was attempting to get close enough to shoot the deer in the head and then get to it. I was going to say, before it sank, but I recall now that a deer does not sink for the reason that the hair of a deer is hollow and filled with air and that holds the deer up till it floats to shore. Anyway, people ran out on the docks with their Winchesters and Winchester 44's and they began firing at the deer and some of the bullets got to whistling over my dad's head and he swung around with his rifle and said, "The next man that shoots, I'll shoot him." The shooting stopped immediately.

My mother stood on the beach screaming and wringing her hands and yelling at the men to quit and so did all the women at the shore.

Another incident which shows the hard-shelled religion of these early days, was one Sunday I was playing on the beach. I was only six years old then. I picked up a part of a beer bottle that had been broken and threw it out in the lake and took a gash out of my thumb. The only consolation I got was when my mother said, "You shouldn't be playing with beer bottles on Sunday."

Sir, You asked about school. There was a little red schoolhouse up on the bluff in back of the town. It seems to me about half way back to Bersaw Creek. My aunt Eunice Berry later became my stepmother some time after the death of my mother in Gladstone. My aunt was the first schoolteacher at that little red schoolhouse at Little Harbor.

So you want to know, Mr. Watson, what happened after my family left Little Harbor. Well, that was in the fall of 1887. In order to get out of town, the only way to do was to drive across the peninsula over to Garden on Big Bay De Noc. My father took my mother and me over. Put us on a little steamer that sailed between Garden and Fayette, which was then an iron mining town, and Escanaba. It was in November. A heavy storm came up. Sleet, freezing waves, the spray went all over the little steamer. Everything was frozen up. We rode and tossed. My mother lay on the outside of the bunk hanging onto the strings across me. We made that perilous trip and by good luck and the grace of God, we landed at Escanaba safe and sound. When the crew came to our cabin (the captain's cabin was where he put us) the crew had to take axes and break the ice away from the door in order to get us out. I remember my mother said, "Why Captain, if we had gone down we couldn't have got out." The captain said, "Well, lady, you couldn't have got out anywhere. There wasn't any place to go. If you had, there wasn't any place to go but down."

Father joined us in Escanaba. We lived there for a year before going to Gladstone. But during that year of '87 and '88 my dad did a lot of timber cruising out of Manistique. He lived, between his trips while working here, at the old Hiawatha Hotel. One day, up north in the woods from Manistique, he was cruising with his compass man. He carried always with him a little Stephens pocket rifle. Ten inch barrel. Thirty-two short caliber. That was for killing the porcupines and getting rid of them and shooting partridge and rabbits for food. This little gun had no trigger guard. The trigger was slotted into a small piece of small projection from the bottom of the frame. He wanted to shoot a porcupine which he hated because he knew they were destroying lots of timber. In fact, in later years, foresters have proved that one porcupine can destroy \$6000 worth of timber by girdling pine trees during the lifetime of that porcupine. He didn't get a chance to shoot at the porky, so he put the gun back in his holster on his left hip. Then he thought, I wonder if I took and let the hammer down, so he reached for the gun and as he was pulling it out of its sheath, the barrel was right at his hip joint, it was still cocked,

the hammer went off, the bullet went into his hip. He sent the compassman to a logging camp for help. He, in the meantime, dragged himself for half a mile on hands and one leg. Finally the lumbermen came with a blanket and they made a stretcher out of it and carried him in that but he couldn't stand to be carried the pain was so bad. So, he said he would have to hang on to two men and walk along on one leg and drag the other and that's the way they got him out of the woods. When he got to Manistique, the doctor probed for the bullet and he told him that another eighth of an inch inward, it would have gone into his body and killed him. As it was, the bullet stopped right at a place where it could.

In 1889, we moved to Gladstone and have lived there since... My father was quite an inventor. He was always trying to invent things or develop things that would make life safer and more comfortable in the woods. If you can realize, back in those days in the last century, there were no big sporting goods stores to go into and buy those things. They were just beginning to have a few of the small, scarce equipment that was being brought over from England where they had pines, sporting goods and equipment there in Scotland and South Africa for years. But we were getting along here on poor and inefficient knives, axes and other equipment. So dad invented the safety pocket-axe and other equipment, such as water-proof match box and pin-on compass for the coat and other items and began manufacturing some of these things in 1893 at Gladstone.

FACTS

In October 1848, Algernon Merryweather, Deputy Surveyor, under contract with the U.S. General Land Office, ran the section and meander lines of Township 39 North, Range 17 West, which included what is now called Little Harbor.

His survey notes read as follows:

"on Section 3 & 10 is a very good harbor (Note: now called Little Harbor) and has been settled by fisherman for several years.

"The usual success of the fishermen at Summer Island on the new fishing ground discovered recently has however drawn them from here, and the harbor is now deserted (there were 15 deserted log cabins)."

"The fish caught here are white fish, trout, herring by gill nets set at two to five miles off the coast."

"In the spring and fall the seine has been very successful on the sand beach bay".

It is interesting to note that apparently Little Harbor was the first white settlement (if such it can be called) in what is now Schoolcraft County. There is no evidence in the field notes of these General Land Office public surveys of 1848 of any settlement or houses at what is now Manistique or on the river (with the exception of course of the Indian "potatoe field" and small Indian settlement on Manistique, (now called Indian Lake).