

Does Island Look the Same Today as a Generation Ago?

A Look at History

BY FRANK STRAUS

Preserving the Past



Many of today's visitors to Mackinac Island are adults who first came to the beautiful Straits of Mackinac when they were children, 20 or 30 years ago. One of the delights of parent-child visits, or senior-citizen excursions, or trips by almost anybody to Mackinac Island is that our love of historical texture makes many parts of the Island look almost exactly the same as a generation ago. Many visitors may have some questions about how Mackinac Island has managed to "stay the same" for so many years when vast changes have come to many other areas of the United States. They may also have some questions

about some of the new things to see that were not here 30 years ago, and their place in the history of Mackinac Island.

Here are some frequently-asked questions that are asked by people who have just come back to Mackinac Island after a generation, or who may be thinking of coming to Mackinac Island:

Question 1: Does Mackinac Island look similar to what it looked like in the 1970s and 1980s?

Trust me, it does. The Mackinac Island State Park, which owns approximately 80 percent of the Island's land area, has taken its stewardship responsibilities seriously in



Fort Mackinac in the first half of the last century. Many differences seen today involve landscaping. The road to the barns and vegetable gardens in Marquette Park are gone, the cow pasture is now a golf course, and large Norway maples now line the avenue to Grand Hotel in the distance. (Postcard courtesy of Bob Cole)

preventing changes to the visual appearance of Mackinac. The State Park recognizes the importance to Michigan of having at least one location where people can return and see sights and details that are visually similar to those of a generation ago.

Question 2: How have local businesspeople and property owners helped to keep Mackinac looking and feeling similar to what it looked like a generation ago?

Largely through architectural preservation. In many cases, local landowners and business owners have made genuine financial sacrifices to retain a "Mackinac Island feel" to their properties. For example, a builder or owner may choose to use building materials that are true to the 19th century, even though they may be more expensive than "modern" materials. A familiar example to many Islanders is painted wooden clapboard siding,

which is significantly more expensive and demands much more upkeep than tinted plastic siding.

Question 3: Is Mackinac Island still a safe place to bring children on a vacation?

Mackinac Island is one of the safest places for young children on a trip in the United States. That being said, it is wise to take some elementary precautions. Too many visitors of all ages treat the absence of cars as an excuse to go wandering out into streets and rural roads throughout Mackinac. Especially on steep hills, everyone, especially children, should look both ways when entering a street. Bicyclists should be careful to brake when going down hills, and younger bikers may want to walk their bikes when going both up and down the steeper slopes. Since the late 1800s, rubber-tired bicycles have sped down Mackinac's hills at speeds faster than 20 m.p.h.

Question 4: What are some of the biggest changes to be seen in Mackinac Island's downtown area since 1980?

Many of Mackinac Island's ferryboats are bigger and faster. Two new hotels, the Lilac Tree Hotel and the Main Street Inn & Suites, have increased the number of beds on Main Street. A wide variety of bed and breakfast establishments have also opened downtown, many of them rehabilitations of pre-existing historic structures. With later ferryboat departures and more accommodation space, today's downtown area is livelier at night.

Question 5: What are some of the biggest changes to be seen at Fort Mackinac since 1980?

In the 1980s, the Mackinac Island State Park began a multi-decade program of rehabilitation and repositioning the historic buildings under its control, especially within Fort

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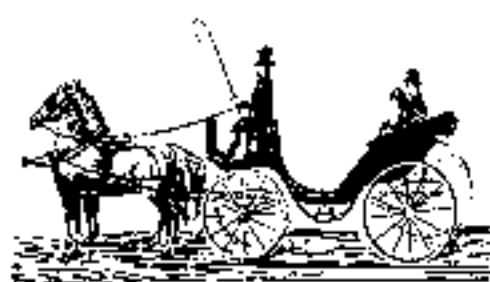
Author Inez Ross will visit Mackinac Island Wednesday, June 8, to sign her new Santa Fe Trail book at the Island Bookstore.

Inez Ross To Sign Books at Island Bookstore Wednesday

Michigan native Inez Ross will visit the Island Bookstore on Mackinac Island to sign copies of her books Wednesday, June 8, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. She is the author of "Without a Wagon on the Santa Fe Trail" and was one of five women who received national recognition for completing a hike of the 800-mile-long trail on foot. It stretches from Franklin, Missouri, to

Sante Fe, New Mexico, and was a trading route between the United States and Mexico from 1821 to 1880. The old wagon route was made obsolete when the railroad reached Sante Fe.

The women walked the route bit by bit, over a period of eight years, reporting each hike in newspaper articles that have been compiled into the paperback book.



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