

Looking Back

Compiled by Ryan Schlehner

This Detroit Free Press article was printed in The St. Ignace Enterprise newspaper July 26, 1890, under the Mackinac Melange column:

Lieut-Col. Leslie Smith of South Norwalk, Ct., was a guest with his wife at the Hotel Cadillac yesterday. He was placed on the retired list of the regular army during the past year and purchased a handsome home and settled permanently at South Norwalk.

A considerable number of years ago, Col. Smith, then a major in rank, was in command of the garrison at Fort Mackinac. He had many friends and acquaintances in Detroit and Michigan but comes back to find that the scythe of time has almost com-

pleted the task of harvesting them.

His eyes were frequently moistened with the tears of saddened memory as he asked after this and that old-time friend, only to find that they had passed from mortal ken forever. After leaving Fort Mackinac, Col. Smith completed his military service in the far west, the last decade being passed without once returning east of the Missouri River.

Col. Smith and his wife are enroute to Mackinac Island for a summer vacation.

"The officer who is not in a position to save anything out of his salary during active service and finds it exceedingly difficult to live in comfort

and make both ends meet on his retired pay," Col. Smith said last evening. "Fortunately for myself, I was able, during the last few years of my active military life, to secure quite a handsome competence through real estate speculation in the western territories. Had I not been lucky in this regard, I should doubtless have had what is forcibly termed 'hard sledding' for the remainder of my life — as do many of my brother officers who are retired.

"When a man's whole life, or all the best years of it, at least, have been passed in the army, it is difficult for one to settle down to any sort of business," Col. Smith continued. "As it is, I have been able to secure a very comfortable home in South Norwalk, a city of 13,000 inhabitants, which is only about an hour's ride from New York City, and expect to end my days in comparative peace and quietness."

Being asked as to the justice of President Harrison's recent

army promotions, Col. Smith said, "There is no justice about them, none whatsoever! Were the matter left to the army to decide, you may be very sure of the fact that President Harrison would never see the inside of the White House after his present term of office has expired. His promotions are all made on a political basis, regardless of justice and equity. President Cleveland, on the contrary, was universally popular in military circles."

— Detroit Free Press.

Island Harbor, Docks Have Hard-Working Past

**Continued from page 16*

Lake Erie — the captain can't ignore the implications of the fact that the telegram got to Mackinac Island before he did.

After the *La Petite* is securely tied to the wharf, the back-breaking job of physically unloading the coal from her hold begins. It takes more than two days to heap up the grimy black lumps into a great pile on the wharf. The soft coal joins all of

the other commodities that James Bennett has for sale. A local advertisement reads:

"BENNETT'S WHARF, Mackinac Island, Mich. Capt. James Bennett, AGENT for the Various Lines of Steamboats Touching At the Island. Dealer in WOOD and COAL (Hard and Soft), Hay, Corn, Oats, and Straw; Fresh and Salt Fish, Fish-Barrels, Salt, etc. All kinds of FORAGE always on hand."

Bennett's Coal Dock is made of cedar piles driven into the harbor bottom, topped with broad planks of old-growth lumber laid across the tops of the piles to create a sturdy surface for the tons of coal. As the commodities are piled up and moved around, some of the planks and piles bend and buckle slightly under the strain. Future owners of the pier will have to carefully raise and block sagging sections of the wharf.

"Finished unloading at noon today," Captain Smith writes in his log. "Tis 9 years this summer since I was here with the *Spy* (in 1867). I find but few changes here."

107 ACRE ISLAND MICHIGAN

Lake Huron Island has 12,100 ft. of shorefront with a beautiful 3-story home, boathouse, storage building, workshop with loft and boatlift. Includes your own private mainland waterfront lot for docking & parking. Only 1/2 mile over protected waters to your private island. \$3.5 M



CALL
JOHN GRIFFIN
Your Real Estate Agent

COLDWELL BANKER
SCHMIDT REALTOR

1-800-861-0033

101 W. M-134, P.O. Box 411
Cedarville, MI 49719

SCHMIDT
REALTORS®

Website:
www.johngriffinrealestate.com

The wind blows steadily in and around the wharf. Captain Bennett has allowed the Island's villagers to put up a small windmill on the pier, which pumps a stream of drinking-water out of the harbor into a tub. The small *La Petite*, riding high in the water, slips her moorings. We quickly hoist a sail so that the schooner can ghost out of the harbor for Cheboygan.

From the standpoint of 2005, the Coal Dock serves much the same function today as it did in 1875. The commodities have changed: yesterday the dock sold hay, coal, barreled fish, and firewood; today the dock sells paint, tools, marine fuel, and propane. For most Islanders it is so practical a place that we give scarcely a thought to how old it actually is. I have asked around in an effort to find out when the Coal Dock was built, but have not yet learned the date. Even the National Park Service doesn't know; the inventory done recently of Island properties in support of the elevation of the whole island to the status of a National Historic Landmark says merely that the Coal Dock was built "before 1910."

Captain Oscar Smith's log, which I quoted above, provides us with a valuable clue. He recalled that the Coal Dock hadn't changed much between 1867 and 1876. If the Coal Dock looked in 1867 much like it did later (and similar to what it looks like today), and if not much was being built on the Great Lakes during the Civil War because of the wartime labor shortage, there are substantial reasons to believe that Bennett's Wharf, known today as the Coal Dock, dates from 1860 or earlier.

Maybe in some future column I will have learned more about this pier and can share it with my readers.

The Carriage House Restaurant at Iroquois Hotel

Waterfront Verandah Dining

102 years of style and service



The Carriage House commands a stunning waterfront location and serves breakfast, lunch and dinner on the verandah or in the glass-enclosed dining room and piano bar.

At lunch, the Smoked Chicken Salad with Apples, Almonds, Currants and Gorgonzola Cheese.

For dinner, try our Pan-seared Diver Scallops with Lemongrass, Ginger, Vermouth and Frizzled Leeks or Maple Glazed Pork Tenderloin with Carmelized Apples, Calvados Sauce and Dauphinois Potatoes.

For a sweet ending to your day on Mackinac, try one of our special desserts; the Mile-High Lemon Meringue Pie or the Famous Iroquois Hot Fudge Ice Cream Puff.

Iroquois
ON THE BEACH
(906) - 847-3321
www.iroquoishotel.com



Digital Prints Available NOW

at
Benjamin of Mackinac Island
Film~Gifts~Cards

Main Street
Mackinac Island
May thru Oct.
847-3822
e-mail:
rbenj36015@aol.com

