

Mackinac, Playing Cards, and a Lake Michigan Ghost Story

One of the favorite leisure-time activities of Mackinac Islanders during the fur-trading era was playing cards. By the early 1800s, the deck of playing cards had been standardized to look similar to the cards of today, although the pasteboard they were made from was not as durable. The printing firm of L.I. Cohen stamped decks of cards for the American Fur Company, which sold them at stores like the one on old Market Street at Mackinac Island. Fur-trader re-enactors can buy duplicate decks today from sources such as Nebraska's Museum of the Fur Trade.

Francois Malhiot was one of the North West Company's traders in the rich fur-trading ground south of Lake Superior before the War of 1812. In his memoir of the winter of 1804-05, he reported taking up his duties at his outpost at Lac du Flambeau, in present-day Wisconsin, only to find that someone had left a deck of cards behind. Later that winter, Malhiot inventoried his belong-

ings and reported that the trading post now had three decks of cards. There was no explanation given for how the two additional decks had gotten to Lac du Flambeau, although given the North West Company's trade routes it is likely that all three decks had passed through Mackinac Island. A telling detail as to the importance of card-playing to French-Canadians of the time was that all three packs had been carried over the forty-five mile portage from the Montreal River. "The Portage road," Malhiot commented, "is truly that to heaven because it is narrow, full of overturned trees, obstacles, thorns, and muskegs. Men who go over it loaded and who are obliged to carry baggage over it, certainly deserve to be called 'men'."

Henry Schoolcraft's predecessor as Mackinac Island's Indian Agent, George Boyd (served 1818-32) reported that even the Native Americans who came to Mackinac Island played cards to some extent, although they preferred the games they themselves had invented. Boyd would have seen Indians playing cards in their campsites located where Mackinac Island's yacht dock is today. The National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. has a rare deck of Chippewa handmade



A Look at History BY FRANK STRAUS Ghost Story

playing cards made from slips of birchbark. The cards are tiny, only two and a half inches long.

Perhaps one of Mackinac Island's most determined card players was Jacques Dufrain, an early 1800s Islander and trader with the American Fur Company (AFC). Just before the winter of 1819-20, Robert Stuart called Dufrain and the teenaged apprentice Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard to his headquarters at the Stuart House, and asked them to join forces to man one of the Company's key winter posts, a cabin set on the Muskegon River in lower Michigan Territory. Soon the pair had set off in a canoe flotilla, loaded with trade goods and a deck or two of playing cards, from Mackinac Island through the Straits of Mackinac to their new posting.

Dufrain "was very fond of card-playing," Hubbard remembered. The twosome may have spent some of their time together with a round of cards,

punctuated by Dufrain's shouted declarations of trump suits in old French – words like "corno" (diamonds), "cune" (hearts), and so on. Even if they had no candles, they could have played cards on clear nights, when the moon was high.

Leisure time for the two was rare, however, even in winter. The tireless Dufrain, as a trader-on-snowshoes, first took on a winter circuit of Indian camps in the Muskegon area, and then led Hubbard on a similar traverse. This was standard AFC practice; the traders of the Upper Great Lakes country were constantly making winter house calls upon their best hunters, seeing how they were doing, lending necessary supplies, and buying such surplus furs as the Indians would make available. Winter pelts were especially desired by the Company because of the thickness of their fur. During one hellish hike, however, Hubbard and Dufrain got lost in the icy Muskegon River wetlands. Dufrain was badly frozen and never recovered his health.

As the pair attempted to return to Mackinac Island in

the spring of 1820, the older trader died in his canoe. Hubbard buried his friend at the mouth of the White River "in the bluff." There is a large sand dune at Duck Lake State Park, near Whitehall, at this location today.

Hubbard recounted the rest of the story in his memoirs, written many decades later. He reported that friendly Indians had heard, coming from the lonely Lake Michigan sand dune where the Mackinac Islander had been buried, a ghostly voice. When Hubbard asked the Indians to what they had listened, they told him they had heard a man, speaking in Dufrain's old French, and calling out trump suits – "corno" and "cune" – in the dialect Hubbard himself had memorized and remembered. A belief that the river-mouth was haunted persisted, Hubbard says, on the Lake Michigan shore for years after this tragedy.

In fact, one can go to Duck Lake State Park today, near the mouth of the old White River north of Muskegon on the Lake Michigan shore, although paying a nighttime call on Monsieur Dufrain is not encouraged; it's not one of the State Parks where camping is allowed. Choose a time on the calendar when the moon will be high, then wait until nightfall. Put a deck of cards in your pocket, climb the big dune until you can see the lake glittering in the moonlight, and offer Dufrain a game.

Advertisement

"What does that Derailer Limit Screw Do?"

The limit stops are two screws that set the limits of how far the derailer can move from left to right. They are usually located on the back of the parallelogram.



IRA GREEN

The ends of the screws bump into internal parts of the parallelogram when the derailer has moved all the way in the direction controlled by that screw.

The limit screws are not intended to move the derailer, they tell it where to stop when it is moved by the shifter control.

Loosening a limit stop allows the derailer to be moved farther in a particular direction by the shifter. Tightening it restricts the motion of the derailer in that direction. Normally, the limit stops need to be set when a new derailer is installed, and should not require any further attention. If they seem to need adjustment on a bicycle that used to work properly, it is usually an indication that the derailer is bent.

On newer derailers, the limit stop screws are labeled: "H" (high) and "L" (low). On some older derailers, there is no such label, because the working ends of the screws are visible. If you shift such a derailer into high gear, note which screw is bumping into an internal part of the derailer...that screw is the high-gear stop, the other is the low-gear stop.

These are not particularly fussy adjustments. Don't be afraid to give half a turn or a turn at a time. The only place where there's any danger is the rear derailer's low gear stop, which can allow the derailer to go into the spokes if it is set very loose. The other limit stop screw will cause overshifting if set too loose, but this is relatively harmless and easily corrected.

Well that's it for today, next weeks consultation, "sweet dude, now make my Derailer shift".

Donny and Ira practice at Mackinac Island Bike Shop on Hoban Street and may be reached at 906-847-6337 for consultations 7 days a week, emergencies by appointment only.

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Daisy Day Raises \$1,300

The total is in and \$1,300 was raised during Daisy Day Tuesday, August 16, for the Stella King Scholarship Fund. The scholarship supports students graduated from Mackinac Island Public School.

Money came from the sale of raffle tickets, daisies, and donations.

The Balsam Shop, Roses and Sadie, the Jaunting Cart,

the Gift Horse, and Candy Smith donated items for the raffle, and several Island shops allowed daisy piggy banks to be placed in prominent locations in their stores for donations.

"Stella would appreciate the fact that she created something that stirs up memories in people," event organizer Barb Fisher said of people's reaction to this year's fundraiser.

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