

State Spotlight Is on Vintage Mackinac

Michigan's motto asserts: "If You Seek a Pleasant Peninsula, Look About You."

If you seek the most storied crossroads of Michigan history, commerce, and politics, look about where the two peninsulas meet.

It's "one of the world's great places," ex-Governor Bill Milliken asserts in the foreword to a just-published and "visually stunning" book from Traverse City-based Arbutus Press, "Vintage Views of the Mackinac Straits Region."

There's been a spotlight on the Straits this summer because of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Mackinac Bridge, including the 50th Labor Day Bridge Walk, celebrated with a flourish Monday by Governor Jennifer Granholm. Her embellishments included promoting a pre-walk bridge run and a crossing by 50 swimmers.

The political spotlight is ablaze again this year at Mackinac Island's Grand Hotel, host of periodic significant political gatherings dating back to the 1940s. Last I counted a few years ago, hotel visitors included five presidents, 23 White House wannabes, five vice presidents, and four first ladies.

Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton and his wife, Hillary, stayed there in July 1987 during a Democratic Governors Association conference hosted by Michigan Governor Jim Blanchard that attracted eight presidential hopefuls.

Over the decades, when there was a looming contest for the GOP presidential nomination, the biannual Republican Leadership Conference at the Grand often attracted the top hopefuls. This month's cattle show of contenders could be the largest ever.

(In a poll published Saturday by the *Detroit News*, ex-Governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts led GOP contenders with 25%; followed by ex-New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, 23%; ex-Senator Fred Thompson, 16%; Arizona Senator John McCain, 15%.)

The Strait's storied political significance started long before Grand Hotel conferences, and the early governors who advocated a bridge and the later ones who walked it.

In 1820, territorial Governor Lewis Cass led a four-

Western Theme Set for Tourism Agency Benefit

The Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau will host its annual Mackinac Night fundraiser Monday, October 1, at 6 p.m. at The Inn at Stonecliffe.

This year's western theme event will include a Texas-style barbecue, Texas Hold'em poker and blackjack games, and a bourbon tasting. Bluegrass music will be provided by Lonesome Country.

A silent auction and raffle are planned, with funds going to support the tourism bureau.

Tickets are limited. For more information, contact the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau at 847-6418.

Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



month, 4,200-mile canoe expedition from Detroit via the Straits (stopping on the island to recruit 23 soldiers) to what is now Minnesota to promote settlement, investigate natural resources, and negotiate with Indians.

Back in those days, Michigan – much of it a bog west of Detroit – was a tough sell for settlement. A warning about unhealthy conditions was put to rhyme in the East:

"Don't go to Michigan, that land of ills; The word means ague, fever, and chills."

But Michigan now is a popular destination for visitors, and the Straits of Mackinac is the crown jewel of its tourism.

Authors M. Christine Byron and Thomas R. Wilson dedicated "Vintage Views of the Mackinac Straits Region" to "all those travelers that over the years visited this magical land."

Among charms of the book are the photographs and postcards of those travelers, collected by Grand Rapids residents Byron and Wilson over years of prowling museums, libraries, and collectors' shows.

The 152-page book has 28 pages on the Straits auto ferries and building of the Mackinac Bridge, including pictures of Governor G. Mennen Williams leading the first Labor Day Bridge Walk and putting a "For Sale" sign on an auto ferry.

(Gloria Whelen's "Mackinac Bridge: The Story of the Five-Mile Poem" earlier was named one of the Library of Michigan's 2007 Michigan Notable Books.)

A superb account of the pre-bridge days is a yet-to-be published book, "Autos Across Mackinac" by Les Bagley, which has been run as a series by *The St. Ignace News*. The book publisher that lands this one will have a gem.

Hang Tough, Guv
The Michigan Democratic

Party, after some fretting about how the national party would react, formally embraced the state's planned January 15 presidential primary next year – a bill sponsored by Senator Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau), and approved late Friday by the Legislature.

Indications were that Governor Granholm, who also had some early concerns about how tough the national party would be in protecting the New Hampshire/Iowa stranglehold on first-in-the-nation process by denying seating of delegates in states that defy it, would sign the legislation.

Senator Carl Levin, who for many years has fought to loosen the stranglehold and make sure candidates focus on issues important to manufacturing states, insists Michigan in a convention fight could defeat the national party rule protecting privileged status for the two states that are unrepresentative of the country, but too often determine winning momentum for nominations.

Levin's right.

As of Friday, three second-tier Democratic hopefuls signed pledges not to campaign in states defying the national party's calendar.

Granholm should be firm with the top tier candidates who want her endorsement: "No primary endorsement for those who avoid my state."

In the Democratic primary poll published by the *Detroit News*, it was: New York Senator Hillary Clinton, 40%; Illinois Senator Barack Obama, 21%; ex-Senator John Edwards of North Carolina, 16%.

Granted, Granholm will campaign for the nominee. But the nominee could be hurt in the fall if there is belated attention to Michigan issues.

George Weeks retired last year after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Where Is Business Support for Medical Center Auction?

To the Editor:

I recently attended the Mackinac Island Medical Center auction held at Grand Hotel. Myself and a large group of friends have been coming to Mackinaw City and to the Island for 21 consecutive years on the weekend before Labor Day. It is the highlight of the summer for all of us. This year there were 25 of us; in past years we've had as many as 40. We golf on the Island on Friday, golf again in the city on Saturday, and come back for the auction on Sunday. We are your biggest fans. This year, as always, the Musser family and Grand Hotel went way above and beyond the call of duty in their efforts to ensure the medical center is as good as possible.

This was our ninth consecutive medical center auction, and it seemed to us that other business owners are not as committed as the Musser family. Why is that? Only two out of three ferry boat companies made donations. Very few hotels made donations. Why not this year? You are fortunate to earn your living in an absolutely ideal situation. Don't forget to give back. It is your responsibility to ensure that business owners, workers, residents, and tourists can expect the best medical care possible.

If there are personality conflicts that cause people not to donate, get over it and do what is best for all concerned.

Robert M. Comfort
Harper Woods

P.S. To the person working an auction table: Adding your name to an item after your table closed is not something you should be doing while guests are watching. Was that item really worth your integrity?


Military Reenactors To Visit Fort

A group of 16th Michigan Company B reenactors will bring Mackinac Island's Civil War history to life when they encamp at Fort Mackinac Saturday, September 8 and Sunday, September 9 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The reenactors will recreate a little-known chapter in Fort Mackinac's history, when the Union Army used the island fortress as a prison for three prominent Confederate sympathizers. Dozens of men and

women will dress in the fashions of the 1860s, including the "Stanton Guard" unit, named after Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and specifically recruited to guard the Confederate prisoners; the three Confederates (named Washington Barrow, Josephus Conn Guild, and William G. Harding); and various civilians of the era.

The 16th Michigan Company B reenactor encampment is included with regular Fort Mackinac admission.



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