

Fur Trader Played Key Role in Formation of Cottage Community



A Look at History

BY FRANK STRAUS

Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard

A couple of days ago, I was driving down a suburban street, south of Chicago, Illinois. It was an ordinary trafficway, with a branch bank on one side and a strip mall on the other. All of a sudden, I saw a small park and a historic marker that called the street the "Dixie Highway." I like historic markers, so I came to a stop. It turns out that underneath the multilane asphalt of this suburban street was buried a prairie trail: "In the 1820s," said the marker, "Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard established trading posts along the trail, identified as Hubbard's Trace and Vincennes Trail on old maps."

The trail, which extended from Chicago's Fort Dearborn to what is now Danville, Illinois, extended along what was ripe fur-bearing territory in the 1820s. The marker did not say what happened to or whence went the furs that were shipped by bale and pack animal along this trail, but Hubbard, the man who blazed this trail, knew. Only a few years before, he himself had been an American Fur Company apprentice and clerk working from sun-up until sun-down in the Company's Mackinac Island fur warehouse, the building that serves today as the Island's Community Hall.

During the 1820s, the American Fur Company's fur warehouse, adjacent Stuart House, and adjoining Market Street stores and craft shops were the economic center of a network of economic power that dominated the affairs of a considerable swathe of U.S. territory. The lands dependent upon Mackinac Island's Market Street

were to become four-and-a-half U.S. states: The states of Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the northern half of Indiana. "Hubbard's Trace," which later became part of the "Dixie Highway" and then part of Illinois Route 1, was one of the elements of a network of goods distribution and kinship that carried manufactured goods such as kettles, traps, guns, gunpowder, lead, fishhooks, and woven cloth outward from Mackinac Island and carried peltry and other goods in.

Hubbard himself was an American success story. The tale of his life has unmistakable parallels with a tale from the library penned by novelist Horatio Alger. The young New Englander, born in August 1802, had been forced to move with his impecunious family to Montreal shortly after the War of 1812, where his unlucky father had clung to the fading hope of finding some sort of respectable employment. Meanwhile, security concerns in Washington were encouraging the American Fur Company to hire energetic American citizens to serve as fur traders in the newly defended fur territories of the upper Great Lakes and Old Northwest. Young Hubbard eagerly signed on for what would be a grueling apprenticeship with the Company.



Summer 2008 marks the 125th anniversary of Hubbard's Annex, the cottage community founded by Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard. (Photograph courtesy of Tom Pfeiffelmann)

As a new member of the clerkship corps of 1818, the 15-year-old Hubbard wielded a paddle to help carry the company's goods westward from Montreal to the Straits of Mackinac. He later recalled, in his "Memoirs," his first sight of the Island that was to be his summer home for the next few years. Soon afterward, he celebrated his 16th birthday. The young clerk was befriended by Madame Laframboise, one of the informal leaders of the Island, who generously entertained many of the parentless young adults who were beginning to congregate on Mackinac.

As an American citizen by birth, young Hubbard was dispatched to serve a series of wintertime apprenticeships in the company's network of fur trad-

ing posts grouped around Lake Michigan. He traded along the Illinois River and on the western shore of what would become Michigan's Lower Peninsula, but by the 1820s he had decided that he liked working in the Vermilion River country the best. The new state of Illinois had been admitted to the Union in 1818, but a patch of land along the eastern edge of the new state had not yet been settled and was still inhabited by the Kickapoo and Miami tribes of Native Americans - Indians.

Young Hubbard developed kinship ties to several extended families of these Indians because they were willing to trade with him. One of these families bestowed upon Hubbard the name of "Swift Walker," in which he took pride for the rest of his life.

Even as late as the 1820s, the eastern strip of Illinois was relatively sterile ground for fur traders because the extreme flatness of the prairie made it almost

Turn to page 21: Straus

J & E Construction, Inc.

~Joe Gugin~

New Construction & Remodeling

Siding • Roofing • Painting • Drywall
Custom Cabinets, Doors & Trim

Island based to serve you better

Give us a call, we can do it all (906) 847-9900

Licensed & Insured

License #2102180061

J.L. Beanery

A COFFEEHOUSE

ON THE BAY

Behind Bay View B&B, Next to Marina

Breakfast • Lunches • Fresh-Baked Pastries • Cappuccino • Espresso

Open Daily
at 7 a.m.

• Gourmet Desserts •
847-6533

Pilates on Mackinac Island

• Monday and Wednesday •

9 a.m. • Classic Pilates Intermediate Level - Classic pace and rhythm
Fast flowing movement. Build strength.

10 a.m. • Classic Pilates Beginner Level - Learn the Pilates fundamentals
Slow paced for precise movement and easy learning.
We start with posture, alignment and flexibility.

Classes are being held in the banquet room of the Lakeview Hotel.
Classes are \$12 and mats are available for sale. Everyone Welcome!

For Women's
Victorian
and
Edwardian styled
clothing,
the largest selection
of Victorian styled
clothing in the world!



Shop online at
www.recollections.biz

or call 1-800-452-5925

Mackinac Album

by Robert Benjamin



Robert E. Benjamin

Now Available At:

Benjamin's of
Mackinac Island

FILM • GIFTS • CARDS

Main Street, Mackinac Island
May thru Oct., 906-847-3822
e-mail rbenj36015@aol.com

The Carriage House Restaurant

at
Hotel Iroquois

Waterfront Verandah Dining

105 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, enjoy 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 Rack of Pork with Calvados, Figs, Cherries, and Carmelized Cippolino Onions.

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

