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November 2009

VOL. # 1 ISSUE #2

Hi Everyone and belated Happy Thanksgiving!!

As promised here is our second Charity Island newsletter. Are you ready for some history??

As most of you know we do a little lighthouse history presentation on each dinner cruise and many people come to me after the presentation to ask if that information is available in written form. The answer has always been "no", followed by a promise to get it done and get it posted on our website.

Well, here is my first effort to record in writing what I know about the history of the charity island Lighthouse.

To appreciate some of the irony of this story requires I begin this history 360 million years ago when a warm shallow sea covered all of what is now Michigan and most of the surrounding Great Lakes states.



That sea was full of tiny primitive aquatic life that became adept at taking carbon out of the air and calcium out the water to build the cell structures their bodies needed to exist.

Over time, as that sea life died, a layer some 80 to 120 feet thick of their remains, mostly calcium carbonate, accumulated on the ocean floor.

Finally, that ancient sea dried up and that ocean floor hardened into what we now call the "bayport limestone formation. The Charity Islands are part of Bayport Limestone formation. Their base is solid limestone and they are sometimes referred by geologists as *bedrock highs*.



Solar Valves

What do the objects above have to do with Charity Island Limestone?

Read on ;-)

The Mighty Oak was once just a nut that held its ground

The Charity Islands Bumps in the Bayport Bedrock

We all learned how the glaciers plowed through and gouged out the Great lakes.

When those glaciers retreated 9,800 to 11,000 years ago the Charity islands were still there because they are bedrock and those glaciers rode or skipped right over them.

When Michigan obtains statehood in 1837 the islands become state-owned property.

Nineteen years later a building crew, sent by the Federal Government, arrives on Big Charity Island to build a 39 foot high lighthouse with a small one story dwelling attached to it for the Light-keepers quarters. The Lighthouse is completed and officially goes into service on August 20, 1857.

In January 1861 Abraham Lincoln is sworn in as President of the United States and three months later shots are fired at Fort Sumter and the civil war begins.

It's eight years after the lighthouse goes into service that the island is finally formally acquired by the federal Government with an executive order signed by Pres. Abraham Lincoln on March 30th, 1865. Fourteen days later he is shot by John Wilkes Booth and dies the next morning.

Near the turn of the century a decision is made to provide better accommodations for the people assigned to work on the island so the original dwelling is removed and a new four bedroom two story house is built in its place.

Before construction begins on the new house the old foundation is upgraded with the addition of a full basement that contains a brick cistern. It is capable of holding 1500 gallons of fresh water



**First Lightkeepers home built in 1857
Next to 39 ft lighthouse**

Latest News **Saginaw Valley** **State University** **Seeks To establish** **research center on Big** **Charity Island.**

We have just learned that Saginaw Valley State University is looking into the feasibility of establishing a research center on Big Charity Island.

We have also learned that the Federal Fish & Wildlife Service people supporting the proposal. Karen and I feel the SVSU's presence on the island will create a lot of economic benefits for our area and are Very excited to see this happen.

We will keep everyone current on the progress of this effort.

Parting shots November 1, 2009



At the time the 2 story house is being built the 39 foot tall light tower under goes modification. It has be raised ten feet higher so it's light will be not be blocked by the new taller house being built next to it. The picture above shows the tower after it has been raised ten feet higher.

In less than twenty years this new home is abandoned when a gas valve is invented that enables the tower to become fully automated in 1917. See pictures page one.

It turns out that acetylene gas, discovered in 1839, was found to produce a very bright flame ideal for Lighthouse lamps. It is produced by cooking limestone or calcium carbonate to just over 2000 degrees which produces calcium carbide and placing calcium carbide in water produces acetylene gas very inexpensively.

One big problem with this gas: it was very dangerous to handle until Nils Gustav Dalen invents a way to store large quantities of it safely and then he invents a valve

that expands in the coolness of the early evening allowing the gas to flow up to the light.

That same valve then contracts in the heat of the morning cutting off the flow of gas resulting in conservation of the fuel. He calls it his "solar valve".

This valve was so important he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for it in 1912, and in 1917 one of these valves were installed at the Charity Island light. The last Lightkeeper on Charity Island was Joseph Singleton who left in December of 1916. More History the next newsletter. Wreck of the Oconto 1885



Hi Karen , **The Trail to the lighthouse Covered with Autumn Leaves November 1st.**



Pitchers Thistle Rosette November 1, 2009

We miss being out there already.

Until next month, good health to you all.

Robert & Karen Wiltse

If you would like our Green Bean Recipe just google "oriental style green beans"

We use fresh green beans, fresh ginger, garlic, sesame oil, soy sauce & honey.

NOVEMBER 2009



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