

New Interpretive Soldier Display at Fort Mackinac Dedicated to Frank Fitzgerald

By Karen Gould

Frank Fitzgerald loved Mackinac Island and Fort Mackinac, and even more, he loved sharing the history of the fort with those who visited the National Historic Landmark, say his family and friends. In a fitting tribute, a new soldier interpretive display at Fort Mackinac was dedicated in his honor with his wife, children, and mother in attendance Friday evening, August 18.

"He had great integrity, and great interest and love of history," said Phil Porter, director of Mackinac State Historic Parks, during the opening ceremony. Mr. Porter hired Frank Fitzgerald to work at Fort Mackinac in 1975.

Mr. Fitzgerald later became a head guide at Fort Mackinac, working there for 15 years, from 1975 to 1980. He also was the former Speaker Pro Tem of the Michigan House of Representatives, was the commissioner of the Michigan Office of

Financial and Insurance Services, and a practicing attorney before he died in 2004, at the age of 49.

Frank Fitzgerald's father, who was a former Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, died last month. His grandfather, Frank D. Fitzgerald, was governor of Michigan in the 1930s.

The new exhibit, "The Soldiers and Mackinac," resides in the Post Headquarters building and contains a computerized biographical database of soldiers who were stationed at the fort. Visitors can search for ancestors or soldiers with the same names or who immigrated from the same town in Europe. If a soldier served at the fort with that last name, the archival information appears on two monitors, one on the computer console and one on the wall.

The exhibit follows a new trend in historical thinking, Mr. Porter said to the more than 30 people attending the ceremony. While historians used to focus on major events, now historical thinkers are putting a face on history by telling the stories of the people who were a part of the story, he explained.

"They are far more interesting to learn about than just the big events," said Mr. Porter. "By better understanding the human history of the people of Fort Mackinac, it gives us a much better sense of the true history of what this place was really like," he said.

Mr. Fitzgerald's daughter Ellen said of her father, "This is definitely an exhibit he'd want to use."

Over the last 20 years, Mackinac State History Parks have been compiling data to learn about the men, women, and children

lived at Fort Mackinac. The included the soldiers who drilled on the parade ground, served time in the guard house, walked sentry along the fort walls, and slept in the barracks.

Mr. Fitzgerald's son, John, said he thought the exhibit was fitting because his father always wondered about each soldier and what their role was during the battles.

The research for this exhibit was made possible by the discovery of the muster rolls at the National Archives in the 1970s. The muster rolls contain attendance reports taken every two months throughout the United States and list the soldiers on duty at a given post at a given time. They provided tidbits about daily life at the post, such as listing those who were gathering firewood on Round Island or getting limestone from Bois Blanc Island to make lime, said Mr. Porter. The muster rolls also included the date a soldier enlisted into the army.

The fort staff also used the Register of Enlistments in the U.S. Army from 1798 to 1914.

Using those combined lists, fort staff was able to take the name of a soldier and determine where he enlisted, his age at the time of enlistment, where he was born, and the color of his eyes and hair, said Mr. Porter.

"This begins to put a human face on the soldiers that lived at Fort Mackinac," he noted.

Computer technology, a custom-designed database, and donations from family and friends of Mr. Fitzgerald made the exhibit possible.

The exhibit is approximately



Inside Fort Mackinac at a new exhibit honoring the late Frank Fitzgerald are (from left) his mother, Lorabeth, his wife, Ruth, and children, John and Ellen.

Board Seeks To Fill Vacant Seat

Clark Township will appoint a new member of the township board Thursday, August 31, to replace Tammy Cruickshank, who resigned from the board July 28. Five residents, Mike Lofdahl, Bud Lowers, Todd Lysinger, Mike Miller, and Maureen Neal, submitted applications for the post by the deadline, Monday, August 21. They are to be interviewed Wednesday, August 30, and the board plans to make its appointment Thursday evening. Both public meetings begin at 7 p.m.

The new trustee will be appointed to serve Ms. Cruickshank's remaining two years of a four-year term.

State law regulates replacement of board members when one resigns, and allows a township board to appoint a replacement within 30 days.

Mrs. Neal lives the Hessel. The other four candidates reside in Cedarville.

Mrs. Cruickshank announced her resignation in a July 26 letter to Clark Township Board, and her resignation was accepted at a special board meeting July 28. She cited working out of Clark Township more than 40 hours a week, and her inability to make personal calls on breaks or during lunch to research or follow-up on projects among her reasons for resigning. Since she gets to Cedarville after Clark Township Hall closes at 3 p.m., she cannot look over bills or question expenses, she wrote.

She cited a recent incident in which Clark Township workers began using a new lawnmower four days before the full board officially approved purchasing the mower at a regular meeting July 20. Supervisor Linda Hudson said at the August 17 regular meeting that she allowed the cemetery sexton to start using the mower without board approval because the cemetery lawns needed mowing.

Memory Walk Set For September 16

Residents of St. Ignace will walk to benefit patients of Alzheimer's Disease at 10 a.m. Saturday, September 16. In Sault Ste. Marie, a Memory Walk fundraiser will take place Saturday, September 9.

The Upper Peninsula chapter of the Alzheimer's Association seeks to raise \$65,000 to support services for patients of the disease in the U.P.

Interested parties can register at the John Fenlon Service Center-Community Action Agency in St. Ignace. The walk begins and ends at the center, and brunch will be served afterward.

Memory Walks will also be held in the following Upper Peninsula communities in August and September: Grand Marais August 26, Ontonagon September 2, Gwinn, Houghton, Ishpeming, and Manistique September 9, Escanaba September 16, L'Anse and Munising September 23, and Marquette and Iron Mountain September 30.

For more information, contact Ronda Schlehuber or Angela Litzner at 643-6746.

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