

Eastern White Pine at Mackinac Island's Point Lookout Recalls Native American Creation Story

By Trish Martin

Mackinac Island Town Crier

Several weeks ago, I rode with a couple of friends up to Point Lookout on Mackinac Island, and I realized that the old Eastern white pine that has stood for years on the cliff overlooking Sugar Loaf has only one live branch; the rest of the tree had died. This old conifer that had proudly stood for years against winds, rains, and snows, finally succumbed to the elements, insects, and old age. For the last few years, it had been dying slowly, first one branch, and then another. Woodpeckers, pileated and others, had been hammering away on this proud old tree, to get out the insects that were feeding on it. I doubt that it will survive the winter, and I will be sad when it passes.

I had often thought of it in relationship to the old creation story that an Ottawa friend of mine had told me (a shortened version, to be sure, as the full version, I was informed, takes three days to tell). The story goes something like this: In the ancient times, the Sky God and Sky Woman lived in the heavens, and living there also was a beautiful pine tree. The Sky Woman somehow became convinced that an evil spirit lived in the tree, and entreated the Sky God to remove it. He eventually gave in, and pulled the tree from the heavens. The Sky Woman ran to the hole where the tree had been, and looking down into it, she saw a face. She was right, she thought, there was a spirit living in the tree, but as she leaned closer to look, she realized that it was the face of a beautiful woman. She leaned closer and she fell into the hole, and as she tried to hold onto the heavens, she grabbed some of the seeds from the great pine. You see, she didn't realize that when the Sky God pulled out the pine, he made a hole in the heavens, and what is below the heavens? The water, of course, so she was looking at her own reflection in the water when she looked into the hole. Now the swans saw her fall, and they swam quickly to the spot and scooped her up onto their backs, for they didn't want her to drown and make the Sky God angry. They realized that they couldn't carry her on their backs forever, and so after talking to the other animals, they decided what to do. You see, it was said that there was earth under the water, and if they could get some, they could have some land on which to put Sky Woman. They called for their best divers and asked them to go below the water and find some land. The duck volunteered first,



This Eastern white pine at Point Lookout has only one remaining live branch.

and he dove and dove, but couldn't reach the bottom. The otter tried it, as he was a powerful diver, but he failed, too. All of the other animals, birds, and reptiles tried it, until only the lowly muskrat remained (it was a female muskrat at that), and she dove and dove, deeper and deeper, until she felt her breath leaving her, but still she reached out. All of the animals on the surface of the water waited and waited, and still no muskrat. Finally her lifeless body floated to the surface, and in her paw was land. They were greatly saddened by muskrat's passing, but they put Sky Woman on the back of a great turtle and gave her the soil, and as the turtle swam, she dropped some of it and some of the pine seeds. And this is how the first land came to be. Sky Woman was now able to stand on dry land, and the pine trees began to grow. The Sky God was so grateful that Sky Woman had been saved, that he blew life back into the poor dead muskrat. So this is how dry land came to be, and the story goes that the first land that was made was Mackinac.

So, whenever I would look at that old white pine at Point Lookout, I would think of this cre-

ation story, as the area around Point Lookout and Fort Holmes was the first part of Mackinac that was above water, so this old pine might have been one of the first to be planted by Sky Woman.

Eastern white pines are fairly easy to identify. Like all pines, they have their needles in clusters, but unlike other pines in eastern North America, the needles are in a cluster of five (same number of letters in the word "white," just a little mnemonic device). Occasionally the needles will be in a cluster of three or four. The needles are slender, straight, three to five inches long, and persist on the tree for a couple of years. They're a pale blue-green in color and have a soft appearance. The tree, on average, stands 60 to 80 feet tall, with a diameter of two to four feet, and

has a very straight bowl. At the top of the tree, the branches form a wide pyramidal crown. Because of the height of the trees, often sticking up above the rest of the canopy, the branches at the top generally bend away from the direction of the prevailing winds, producing a characteristic and picturesque shape, which often makes them easy to identify from a distance. If you go up to Fort Holmes and look down, you can see them towering over the forest below.

The bark on twigs are often covered with rusty hair and later become smooth, light brown/greenish. The trunks of mature trees are dark gray, almost black, with thick, shallowly fissured bark, which as it ages forms broad scaly ridges. The cones of this pine, which mature in the autumn of their second year and fall in the following winter, are four to 10 inches long. They hang downward, are short stalked, and narrowly cylindrical, often curved. The scales are rather loose, slightly thickening at the apex, and overall seem less woody than many of the other pine cones.

Eastern white pines (*Pinus strobus*) have been of great importance to Michigan. It was made the official state tree of Michigan because it was the backbone of the lumber industry, particularly in the last quarter of the 19th century. At that time, Michigan led the nation in lumber production, and this state had the finest stands of these pines in the world, with trees attaining the height of 150 to 200 feet tall, with diameters of five to seven feet, much larger than most white pines. The lumber from Eastern hite pines is very lightweight, 27 pounds/cubic foot, fairly soft, and easily worked. Very close and straight grained, and although it splits readily, it nails well. This pine has been used for doors, window sashes, interior finished and other carpentry, patterns, cabinet work, matches, and boxes. It is considered the most generally useful of all American woods.

Besides its use as a building material, the Eastern white pine has also been used for medicinal purposes. The crushed or boiled nee-

dles of the tree, applied to the forehead, were used by the Ojibwa to relieve headaches. The needles are also high in vitamin C, and were made into tea to cure scurvy. The smoke from the needles, put in a small hole with hot stones placed upon them, was inhaled to cure backaches and headaches. The Menominee steeped the inner bark of the young trees and drank the tea to relieve chest pain. A poultice, made from the pounded bark, was used for burns, scalds, wounds, and sores. Sometimes the boiled trunk of young trees would be added to the inner bark of cherry trees (*Prunus serotina* and *P. americana*) and made into a mash. The mash was then dried and later resoaked to make a poultice for wounds. Bark tea was thought useful in urinary and kidney troubles. The male cones (strobili) were used in liniments for rheumatism. The gummy sap, made into a decoction, was used for sore throats, colds, and consumption. The gum also has been used to relieve rheumatic and muscular aches. I guess you could say that, overall, the Eastern white pine is a

pretty useful tree.

Yesterday, I went up again to see my old friend, the white pine, at Point Lookout. It's not straight and tall like most white pines, it's windblown and scruffy, but it's tenaciously hanging on to the cliff edge of the ancient Island and tenaciously hanging onto life. I thought of all the years that this tree had seen, and was reminded of a quote from John Fox Jr. from his book, "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine," published in 1908: "He had seen it [the pine] giving place with somber dignity to the passing burst of spring - had seen it green among dying autumn leaves, green in the gray of winter trees, and still green in a shroud of snow - a changeless promise that the earth must wake to life again. The lonesome pine, the mountaineers called it, and the lonesome pine it always looked to be." I often think of this pine at Point Lookout as Mackinac's "Lonesome Pine."

Trish Martin is a year-around resident of Mackinac Island, has earned a master's degree in botany from Central Michigan University, and owns Bogan Lane Inn.

Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



Women Make Inroads on Benches

The seal of the Michigan Supreme Court and other judicial bodies features a robed woman with a blindfold holding the scales of justice. But getting women elected to actually judge from on the bench has been a slow process.

Of Michigan's 105 justices since statehood, only six have been women, the first elected being Republican Mary S. Coleman of Battle Creek in 1972. She later became chief justice.

Three of the six currently sit on the court, former chief justices Betty Weaver of Glen Arbor and Maura Corrigan of Grosse Pointe Park, both Republicans, and Democrat Marilyn Kelly of Bloomfield Hills.

Of 27 current Court of Appeals judges (there's one vacancy), seven are women.

After the August 5 primary, general election local ballots from the Upper Peninsula to Metro Detroit are replete with female candidates for judge.

Most notable: Ingham Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield, one of 12 children born and raised in Atlantic Mine near Houghton in the Keweenaw Peninsula, who contends for the sprawling, 58-county 4th Court of Appeals District that includes all of the Upper Peninsula.

She's in a face-off with Flint-based attorney Michael Kelly, who has a magic name in downstate politics and qualifies for the district because he has a residence in Leelanau County. (Flint is in the 2nd District). In the four-candidate primary that included two other men, Kelly outpolled Manderfield, 89,566 to 73,238, and swamped the two other guys.

One of the defeated men was Eric Doster, the Michigan GOP legal counsel favored by party bigwigs. They unwisely persuaded popular state Representative Kevin Elsenheimer (R-Kewadin) to step aside for Doster for the appeals seat being vacated by Judge Bill Schuette, a former congressman, state senator, and state ag director who was a high achiever except for his failed 1990 challenge of Senator Carl Levin.

In Marquette County's 25th Circuit Court, assistant prosecutor Jennifer A. Mazzuchi and Negaunee attorney Kevin Koch outpolled two others to compete for an open seat.

There's an interesting face-off between two Sault Ste. Marie women to replace retiring 91st District Judge Mike MacDonald, who, says *Inside Michigan Politics* (IMP), "is off to run an apple orchard on Drummond Island."

Emerging from the five-candidate primary were Leanne Barnes Deuman, with 1,926 votes, and Elizabeth L. Church, with 1,575.

Deuman, as quoted in *The Evening News*, well articulated how judicial candidates must run in light of the fact that they cannot prejudice issues on which they must later judge:

"You have to run on who you are."

Good advice for all who run for all offices.

State House Races

It's unlikely that Republicans, who rule the state Senate, can seriously erode the 58-52 edge that Democrats have in the House. But some of the most competitive races, including chances for Democrats to take seats now held by Republicans, are Up North. Some races to watch:

101st: Representative David Palsrok (R-Manistee), now term-limited, had a scare two years ago from Northport lawyer Dan Scripps, who is again the Democratic nominee and last week had a Benzie County campaign event boost from ex-Governor Jim Blanchard.

Manistee County grocer Ray Frantz won the GOP primary by a mere nine votes over Leelanau County farmer/educator Mike McManus, who seeks a recount and promises to support Frantz if the original count holds for this toss-up fall race.

106th: Running again for this now-open seat of term-limited Representative Matthew Gillard (D-Alpena) is ex-Representative Andy Neumann. The Republican nominee is Presque Isle Township Supervisor Pete Pattalia, who defeated two primary opponents. It is, says IMP, "one of the very few seats House Republicans feel they have a chance to recapture from the Dems."

108th: Judy Nerat of Menominee County, the 2006 Democratic nominee, won nomination again by 76 votes and faces Republican Mike Falcon of Gladstone in what IMP calls "one of the most Democratic-tilted districts currently represented by a Republican."

The term-limited incumbent is Tom Casperon of Escanaba, who is challenging U.S. Representative Bart Stupak (D-Menominee).

U.S. Representative Pete Hoekstra (R-Holland), the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, made a mid-August campaign swing with Casperon.

In a visit to *The St. Ignace News*, Hoekstra observed:

"Four dollars per gallon is a hardship for a lot of people, and the further north you get, the more rural you get and the more miles that people drive."

George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for *The Detroit News*. His weekly *Michigan Politics* column is syndicated by *Superior Features*.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Mackinaw City Council Will Move Beyond Insult, Establish Zoning

To The Editor:

As President of the Village of Mackinaw City, I feel compelled to respond to my friend, Dick Moehl, whose Letter to the Editor was published in the August 21 issue of *The St. Ignace News*. Yet, this response is not to correct my friend's many errors of fact, which are many, and that Council can and will sort out; rather, it is to register dismay in Mr. Moehl's implication that Mackinaw's public servants are so mentally deficient that certain pending zoning consequences are, and I quote, "beyond the imagination and thought process of the Planning Commissioners and Council trustees."

Ouch!... "beyond the imagination and thought process."

But, fear not, an apology will follow from Mr. Moehl and others, and Council will move beyond this unproductive, emotionally charged insult and thoughtfully establish the appropriate zoning classification for the parcels in question. Incidentally, zoning stays with the property and is never carried away by the property owner.

Ronald E. Wallin, president
Village of Mackinaw City

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Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.