



DeTour Passage Keeper Statue Has Become Community Landmark

By Jonathan Eppley

Throughout the history of the Great Lakes, there have been many types of dedicated onlookers keeping a watchful eye for lake-going vessels to ensure their crews' safety in all types of weather. Lighthouse keepers, harbor masters, and passage keepers are just some of the many nautical caretakers who have helped vessels avoid maritime accidents.

Modern navigational equipment and instruments, however, have made such jobs, and their long maritime tradition, all but obsolete. Around the Great Lakes, many lighthouses and permanent buoys have been preserved for their beauty and to pay tribute to these once crucial jobs.

In DeTour Village, Bonnie and Larry Schlink honor the memory of those workers and their commitment to nautical safety with a 15-foot-tall wooden statue in their front yard. The couple commissioned chainsaw artist Edwin Lafayette to carve The Passage Keeper statue out of a dying cottonwood tree. The Keeper watches out for all ships passing between DeTour Village and Drummond Island.

When the couple moved to their home across from the state public dock on Ontario Street in 2006, a 125-foot-tall cottonwood tree was in the front yard. The tree, which is claimed to have been one of the oldest trees in the

village, was struck by lightning the previous year and was barely surviving. The Schlinks tried to keep the tree alive, but ultimately it had to be cut down.

"It was a big tree. We hated to see it go," Mrs. Schlink said. "You'd be out on the water looking toward DeTour and that tree stood above everything else."

Instead of removing the tree completely, they decided to convert the trunk into The Passage Keeper statue. It took Paradise chainsaw artist Mr. Lafayette six weeks in the spring of 2007 to complete the statue, which has since been photographed by hundreds of tourists and is even featured on local postcards.

"I would say at least 200 people stop to take pictures of it every year," Mrs. Schlink said. "There are a lot of people that just pull over to the side of the road and take pictures."

The Schlinks can see every boat that passes through the straits from their home and they said the statue is large enough for boats, including freighters, to see it from the water as they pass by.

The statue is of a bearded man standing with one leg perched up on a rock, gazing out over the water. His right arm, which is carved out of the original tree branch, is holding a lantern over his head. In his left hand is a rope attached to an anchor that lies at his feet. The statue is all

one piece, Mrs. Schlink said, except for the lantern, which was carved out of another piece of the tree. The couple wants to install a solar-powered light inside the lantern someday.

While carving, Mr. Lafayette used scaffolding to start at the top, Mrs. Schlink said, and worked his way down, keeping the old man properly proportioned as he went. She said he used five chainsaws of different sizes to carve the statue. Each year, the statue is re-covered in varnish to protect it from the elements.

"The sheer volume and size [of the statue], he had never done anything this large before," she said about the artist. "Edwin did a marvelous job on him."

The couple, originally from Pinconning, vacationed in DeTour for more than 20 years before moving there three years ago. Since that time, they said many DeTour residents have told them how much they enjoy the statue, as well as stories about playing near that tree when they were young.

"Most people probably would have just taken the tree right down to the ground and that would be the end of it. It'd been here for so long that we felt something should honor that tree," Mrs. Schlink said. "If he could talk, I'm sure he would have told us some marvelous things."

At left: The Passage Keeper statue in DeTour Village was carved out of a cottonwood tree with chainsaws. It has become a local landmark, and draws many visitors taking photographs. Owners Larry and Bonnie Schlink pose with statue in their front yard on Ontario Street across from the state marina.

Caregiver Support Groups Will Meet Twice in December

Two caregiver support groups will meet in December. The Les Cheneaux Caregivers Support Group will meet at the Les Cheneaux Community Library in Cedarville Thursday, December 10, at 4:30 p.m.

In Sault Ste. Marie, the Caregiver Support Group will meet in the second floor conference room at the Avery Square Center Wednesday, December 30, at 2 p.m.

North Country Trail Hike Is December 12

The Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore chapter of the North Country Trail Association is hosting a hike Saturday, December 12, at 9 a.m. at the North Country Trail crossing on East Lake Road. Participants are asked to bring a

potluck dish. The hike will be along the base of the Niagara Escarpment.

For more information, contact Charlene at kcmlid@lighthouse.net or Stan and Kay at (989) 350-2826.

Looking Back

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[Ron] Wallin informs that dredging for the "Welcome" dock has been completed and the Mackinac Island State Park Commission plans to launch the vessel in the spring.

The red carpet treatment for Christmas shoppers in St. Ignace area is part of the "promotional game plan" of the area's retail merchants.

Mackinac Island-Mackinaw City Day is December 15.

That's the day that part of the transportation cost to reach St. Ignace is paid by St. Ignace merchants. For Islanders, a \$2 refund awaits them when they present a coupon given them at the boat dock. For those crossing the bridge, a \$1.50 refund will be given by merchants for their bridge receipt.

Salaries going back to 1975, totaling \$17,500, were paid to the Mackinac County Commissioners in their last month's meeting.

The money represents the salary increases the commissioners set for themselves December 11, 1974, but suspended two months later, February 13, 1975 pending answer from the attorney general to whether their action had followed proper legal procedures.

The salary boosts that year was from \$600 a year for each commissioner, except to the chairman, to \$1,200 a year. For the chairman the increase was from \$700 a year to \$1,800 a year.

30 YEARS AGO
The Weekly Wave
December 6, 1979

Citizens turned out to support the development of a public access site on Park Avenue at a special meeting called by Lark Township on Monday, December 3.

The township plans to develop the site for more convenient access by ice fishermen to the lake and for additional day parking. The public

access is at the end of Park Avenue, at the entrance gate to the Woodland Park subdivision.

Don and Joan Patrick have opened their new Wool N' Down Shop building in Cedarville, providing expanded display and sales space for the clothing store and creating a pleasant shopping atmosphere.

The new 40-foot by 60-foot building, across M-134 from the old Red Owl building, was built this fall by Frank Taylor, who is leasing to the Patricks.

"I was 37 and weighed more than 300 pounds. I knew where I was headed. I put Dr. Featherstone right up there with my family and God. He truly did save my life."

*-Shelley Heinz,
Traverse City
(pictured)*



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