

THE WOODING STATIONS

These ships were fueled by wood and had a voracious appetite for it. This gave rise to a new industry on the Great Lakes ... cutting stovewood and refueling steamships. Logging-refueling stations appeared wherever there was a good supply of hardwood near a good natural harbor. One such place was South Manitou Island. Much of the traffic in the Manitou Passage involved shipping between Chicago and Buffalo. The island, which had been known as a primary port of refuge for many years, and the only natural port in the 300-miles between the Straits of Mackinaw and Chicago, was ideally located as the first "wooding" stop for Buffalo-bound ships, and the last one for the Chicago-bound traffic.



In the early days of the steamboat era, ships entered South Manitou's deepwater bay and their crews would go ashore to set about the work of chopping and loading stovewood for their boilers. In 1835 an enterprising young man named William W Burton got off a boat at the Island and stayed to set up shop as a timber merchant. Although his initial occupancy was probably seasonal, he is generally accorded the distinction as the Island's first "permanent resident" and entrepreneur, and probably the first in the region known as the Manitou Passage. His venture prospered, and within a few years South Manitou had virtually monopolized the refueling business. A passenger on one of the many vessels stopping here "to wood" wrote about the Island's loggers, describing them as scruffy ruffians who lived in crude

huts and spent most of their off-time drinking and gambling away their earnings.

Within a dozen years, Burton had established "civilization" on the Island at a point near the middle of its bay which became known as Burton's Wharf. A state survey party working on the Island in 1847 recorded a dock, a general store, a blacksmith shop and a three-mile wooden railway (used to



move logs from the forest to the dock area.) This small village on the shores of Crescent Bay was the first pioneer settlement in the area, which was still a wilderness. It was inhabited mostly by Burton's loggers, and other individuals who

worked in supporting roles or other enterprises connected with the boat traffic. It also became a trading post, with Indians making the crossing in their canoes from *Mishimigobing* on the mainland (Leland) to trade in Burton's store. Interestingly, William Burton never purchased or otherwise legally acquired any property on the Island until about 1849, so for some 14-years he was apparently stealing and selling what was legally the property of the State of Michigan. Burton and his son continued as the island's major businessmen for another 40-years. By the 1880's most steamships had converted from wood to coal, and the island's era as a refueling stop had come to its end. The Burtons sold off their holdings sometime after 1880 and moved on to California.

During Burton's time, South Manitou became a regularly scheduled stop for ships whose business took them through the Passage. These boats became familiar sights as they entered the bay, their operators and crewmen, familiar faces. An at-large community of mariners had developed on Lake Michigan, and South Manitou became one of its centers.

Burton's operation on South Manitou was the first of several similar enterprises that sprung up in the area.

Nicholas Pickard came to North Manitou Island when he was about twenty-seven, a "wood agent" for his Uncle who operated steamboats out of Buffalo. He established a similar operation on the north island probably about 1845, and by 1847 he had some forty woodcutters working for him. In 1849 he built his first dock near the southern tip on the east side of the island. Like Burton, he was making money selling timber he didn't own, a practice which apparently went unquestioned in these times. By 1860, at age forty-three, he had become wealthy enough to have acquired over 1,200 acres on the island, holding logging rights on much of the rest. At some point Pickard apparently felt that the physical characteristics of the north island gave him a special advantage over the Burton operation on the south island, and he built a second dock on the island's west side, a few miles north of South Manitou's northern-most shores. Steamships wishing to avoid the passage by sailing around the north and west sides of the island then became his customers, as did those arriving during times when easterly winds made sailing into South Manitou's bay chancy. This proved to be a marginal venture. Shortly before 1860 he sold the dock to a mainlander, who closed it down thirteen years later. The little settlement that had developed here ultimately became the area's first ghost town. The north island probably saw its most prosperous decade during the 1860's. In the decade that followed, business declined, there being only one wood merchant left on the island by 1880. Pickard lived to be about sixty years old, dying about 1877.

In 1862 Thomas Kelderhouse, already a successful businessman and ship owner, noticing the area's unique geographical advantage and business potential on his voyages through the passage, built a dock on the mainland just south of Pyramid Point. One of the first steamships to dock at this place was the S.S. Oneida, and the place then became known as Port Oneida. Over the next twenty-five to thirty years, Kelderhouse

continued to acquire land, and the town grew to include a sawmill, a blacksmith shop, a boarding house, general store and post office, two barns and the Kelderhouse home itself. Kelderhouse died in 1884, and the business passed to his children. By the 1890's the Kelderhouses had chopped and shipped most of the wood that was available in the area, and most of the steamships on the Great Lakes were now burning coal. The dock and sawmill went on the block and were sold off in the early 1890's, and by 1908 all the buildings in what had been the town of Port Oneida were abandoned, except for the Kelderhouse home, which was occupied by one of the sons. So the empire built by Thomas Kelderhouse lasted only about thirty years.

October 8, 1871 is loosely known as "The Day Michigan Burned". Some forty towns burned to the ground on that day. Glen Haven was one of them. The town, some say was originally called

"Sleeping Bearville", had been established on Sleeping Bear Bay by Charles McCarthy in the 1850's. An inn was built in 1863, then a 100-yard long dock was constructed in 1865. With these fine



facilities, Glen Haven became one of the busiest steamship stops on the Great Lakes. In 1870, the Northern Transportation Company (NTC) bought Glen Haven and the cordwood operation, to service their fleet of 24 steamships.

A year later, on that "Black Sunday" which also spawned the infamous Great Chicago Fire, fires raged all along the shores of Lakes Michigan and Huron, from Illinois, through Wisconsin and into the Upper Peninsula, then around the top of the "mitten" and into "the thumb" area. As the smoke from these conflagrations drifted out into the lakes and settled over the cooler waters, navigation became difficult at best, and

impossible in some areas, resulting in a rash of groundings, collisions and shipwrecks. Some called the fires "God's wrath", fearing the end times had arrived. Others blamed them on freak lightning storms, and still others on a shower of meteors. The facts were probably less dramatic.

In 1871 the wooding business along the lakeshores was at its peak. Simultaneously, the railroad business was rapidly developing; some just small lines of track belonging to the loggers, while others operated larger inter-city systems carrying paying passengers and freight. Both businesses tended to be paternalistic, with the livelihoods of those living in their service areas tied closely to their operations. Few were willing to challenge or criticize their operations or methods if, in fact, they ever gave it any thought. For their part, the loggers ran "chop and slash" operations, leaving piles and debris and slashings in their logging areas, and sawdust everywhere else, from the mills to the docks. Roads were frequently "paved" with the plentiful sawdust, its resins helping to stabilize their sandy substrate. Others were covered with wood scraps to tighten them up. Areas in towns around the mills and at the docks were littered with stockpiles of chord wood and sometimes shingles and finished lumber. NTC, with their major dock in Glen Haven, had become one of the largest wooding operations in the area, so this scene was no doubt the Glen Haven of 1871.



Meanwhile, like the steamboats, the railroads of this period also burned wood in their locomotives, showering sparks and embers in their wake as they sped along their tracks. The interesting shapes of the large smoke stacks seen on early locomotives reflects the serious work that was being done on developing spark arrestors for these machines. Nevertheless, locomotives were notorious

for starting brush and forest fires, and more than half of such fires were attributed to railroad operations. Like many others, NTC owned its own tracks, and ran its own locomotives to carry logs from the woods to the mills and the dock.

The late summer of 1871 had been unusually hot and dry. Scant rainfall during the months of August and September had turned these areas into tinderboxes, waiting for the slightest hint of flame to set them off. During the afternoon that fateful day, the winds turned around to the southwest, and gathered in intensity to near hurricane force. Once kindled, the blazes almost instantly grew far beyond the rudimentary fire fighting abilities of the company and local residents.

Firestorms moved rapidly through the forests and towns. These tornadoes of fire, easily jumped clearings and streams, spewing large pieces of burning material into the air, some of which was later found as far as twenty or thirty miles from its original location. Air temperatures increased beyond the kindling temperature of dried out boards, and buildings with no sign of fire immediately nearby could suddenly explode into flame and burn to the ground. Roads which had been "improved" with sawdust, bark or wood also burst into flame, blocking escape routes. There was little anyone could do but hurriedly gather up prized belongings and important papers and run to the beach, seeking safety at the water's edge and helplessly watching their town burn down.

In a bitter enigma of the sort which sometimes seems all too common in life, torrential rains came the very next day.

There had, of course, been fires in the area before, and others would follow. But none ever had, nor ever would, match the epic proportions of those that began on Sunday, October 8, 1871. The loss of lives was numbered in the thousands, the loss of buildings in the ten-thousands and the loss of fortunes in the hundreds of millions ... not to mention the personal tragedies of those who lost loved ones, and everything they had accumulated during their lifetime.

Forest and brush fires were, and still are, a more or less natural phenomenon. But the sad statistics resulting from the fires of 1871 can be attributed largely to the production and consumption of wood, either as a cheap, readily available fuel, or as a plentiful and inexpensive building material. From this point of view, the fires of "Black Sunday" might be seen as another contribution the loggers made to the area's history.