

PROTECT THE PENINSULA

NEWS AND VIEWS

Published by Protect the Peninsula for the Residents of Peninsula Township



**Legacy of Good
Land Steward-
ship Benefits All
Generations in
the Township**
Oakley Lardie (90) shares
knowledge with MSU stu-
dent Grant Bauman.



Historical roots of conservation on the Old Mission Peninsula

*by Joanne M. Westphal
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Most of us are aware of the inherent beauty of the Old Mission Peninsula. After all, it was probably the reason that many of us chose to live here. But much of its indigenous beauty has been consciously guarded over the years by citizens like yourselves who became involved when outside development threatened one or more of our valued resources. The following article is a brief synopsis of the history of the Old Mission Peninsula. It includes interesting events and personalities who have affected land conservation and stewardship. Many of the names that will be mentioned in the historic development section have been recognized in the naming of streets, land features, and special places on the peninsula. Much of this material comes from a book that John Wunsch and I wrote for the American Farmland Trust called *Forging New Protections* (1996). Dennis Bidwell and Valerie Berton from the American Farmland Trust secured funds and helped to organize the book for publication. Copies of the book can be purchased from the American Farmland Trust, Washington, DC.

1 HISTORIC ROOTS OF LAND CON- SERVATION & STEWARDSHIP

1A. Historic Development

The Old Mission Peninsula is a landmass that literally bisects Grand Traverse Bay in a south to north direction. Composed of sandstone and limestone between two softer deposits of shale (Lusch, 1998), it resisted the grinding effects of the Glaciers as they moved from a northeast to southwest direction during the last ice age (approximately 12,000 years ago).

The end result was a 17-mile long, and 1 1/4 to 4 mile wide peninsula with two natural deep water harbors, one at Bowers Harbor on the west side of the peninsula and the other at Old Mission Harbor on the east side. Nearly 42 miles of coastline marked this narrow strip of land; the dramatic elevation changes, natural sea shelves, and the surrounding water created a unique microclimate. Finally, despite the absence of a

river system, the glaciers carved three natural inland lakes.

In 1839 the first European settlers arrived at Old Mission from Mackinaw Island. Composed of two Presbyterian ministers and several craftsmen, they were greeted by Native Americans (Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Chippewa) who had a permanent camp at Elk Rapids. The Native Americans were growing corn, squash, and apples in the summertime within an extensive forest system on the Peninsula. In 1847, timber harvesting accelerated on the peninsula, and millions of board feet of timber were sent to mills in Traverse City. In exchange for the timber, homesteaders were given partially cleared lands for farming purposes. On April 4, 1853, Peninsula Township was incorporated, and with the advent of the federal land sales (between 1860 and 1865), almost every section of the peninsula had at least one family of homesteaders. Sale of cutover lands held by Perry Hannah and the Hannah and Lay Company of Traverse City hastened the settlement of the peninsula in the 1880's and 1890's. Many of the earliest settlers were the first of nearly five generations to occupy the land.

1.A.1 Agriculture Follows Forestry

Reverend Peter Dougherty was believed to be the first individual to plant a cherry orchard in 1852 near the Old Mission townsite. Another early settler, John Garland, raised the first peach crop in 1859. By 1867, so much fruit was grown that a fruit center and exchange was established on the peninsula at Bower's Harbor to ship the produce to other ports on the Great Lakes (Page 1884; Potter 1956; Leach 1883). Meanwhile many farmers on the peninsula were becoming famous for their progressive agricultural practices; families like the Gray family and Kroupa family were featured in books that highlighted significant families of the region (Page 1884). Activities of the Farmers Grange associations were recorded in numerous papers and documents. (Three Grange associations existed on the Peninsula). And many ethnic communities (particularly Swedish, Irish, and Bohemian) developed informally, based

on land ownership and homesteading practices.

1.A.2 Stone Fruit Industry Emerges

Commercial cherry orchards as we know them today were developed around 1893 (Meyer 1988). Many farmers converted potato and apple orchards to cherry orchards to take advantage of the lucrative cherry market, which grew when lake and overland rail transportation improved. The cherry conversion was so rapid that by 1905, red tart cherries had become the dominant crop in the area. Fruit was shipped to Chicago, Milwaukee, Toledo and Detroit via rail or lake schooner. By 1923, cherries were such an important crop to the community, a religious ceremony called the "Blessing of the Blossoms" was instituted; today, that ceremony has evolved into the annual week-long National Cherry Festival, which attracts thousands of visitors to Traverse City every July.

Because of the unusual microclimate created by Grand Traverse Bay and Lake Michigan, the growing season on the Old Mission Peninsula is nearly 50 days longer than areas in Kalkaska County (USDA 1990). This allows stone fruits like cherries, peaches, apricots, and nectarines to flourish at latitudes that normally would not permit these types of agricultural products. Today, grapes have joined the agricultural cornucopia that marks this unusual peninsula.

1.A.2 Resorting Communities

Land settlement by the early Europeans was not always compatible with the natural processes that were at work on the peninsula for centuries. Within a relatively short time period of forty years (1850-1890), most of the virgin white pine and many of the specimen hardwoods were felled and removed from the landscape. On sites too steep to safely traverse, a few trees escaped the sawyer. Only in areas settled early by religious affiliations and/or in certain ethnic enclaves, were forested areas spared. But even these wooded areas, over time, were selectively harvested.

Among some of the most noteworthy early conservation groups on the peninsula were the religious associations

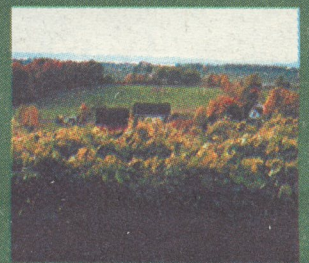
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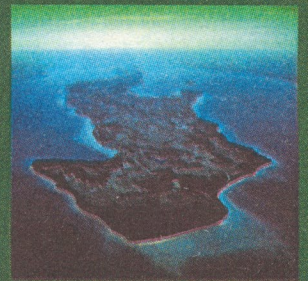
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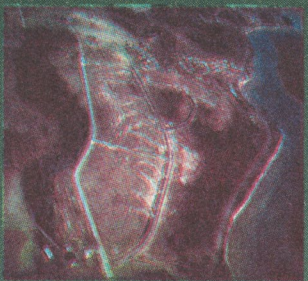


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found at Neahtawanta and Leffingwell. Both of these associations were formed in 1881, and land was purchased on the behalf of each group. The early plats of each area are stored at the township hall. The author has published a book on vernacular architecture that highlights both of the early plats as well as many of the structures found in these two resort areas (Westphal, 1996).

The Neahtawanta Association hailed primarily from Cleveland, Ohio, and they occupied the point of land adjacent to Bower's Harbor called Neahtawanta Point. The original plat of the resort area on the point called for hundreds of 35-50 foot wide lots, less than 100 feet long. Fortunately, most association members bought several blocks of residential lots, so only a limited number of lots were actually developed. But because the resort area was set aside to create a summer retreat, community owned facilities marked the development. A hotel was built for guests of the cottage owners, and all meals were taken at the hotel. The beach area was preserved for all association members, and the old laundry building (which serviced the hotel until it burnt in 1913) became a community center. (This building still stands today). Community tennis courts, sidewalks, and open space complimented this early development.

Likewise, on the Old Mission Harbor side of the peninsula, the Leffingwell association formed around 1881 from a religious group that had its roots in the Chicago area. Reverend Leffingwell was one of the first settlers in the area, and he encouraged others to purchase land as part of a summer resort. The Leffingwell association was very conscious of the impact of "outsider" development on the integrity of their resort, so the association purchased a considerable amount of land to the north of them. This land was subsequently placed in a conservation easement in the early 1900's which is held by the association on the behalf of its members. Additional land has been purchased in the 1990's to continue the association's interest in preserving forest and farmland in the vicinity of Old Mission. Today, these two resort areas have some of the finest examples of Victorian stick architecture and second growth forest on the peninsula.

1.A.3 Margaret Wilson and the Old Mission Women's Club

One of the most influential conservation-minded individuals on the peninsula was Margaret Wilson. Margaret was president of the Old Mission Women's club in the 1950's, and she at times fought single-handedly to stymie commercialization of the peninsula. A stone memorial to her rests at the base of the Old Mission Peninsula where Peninsula Drive and M-37 split. More than any other person in the township, Margaret can be attributed with the effort to outlaw billboards and excessive signage on the Peninsula. Soliciting help from her associates in the Women's Club, she personally cajoled, threatened, and/or intimidated businessmen to remove advertising that had been placed along roadways in the township. She also effectively mounted a campaign to create an ordinance outlawing billboards in the township. Today, the roadways of Peninsula Township stands in sharp contrast to the roadways of Acme and Garfield Townships because one citizen had the foresight to fight for the public's good (instead of special interests). Her effort is one of the best examples of citizen involvement in township government. Unfortunately, both Acme and Garfield townships continue to lack leadership that emanates from its residents; as a result, the Grand Traverse region suffers from this inactivity.

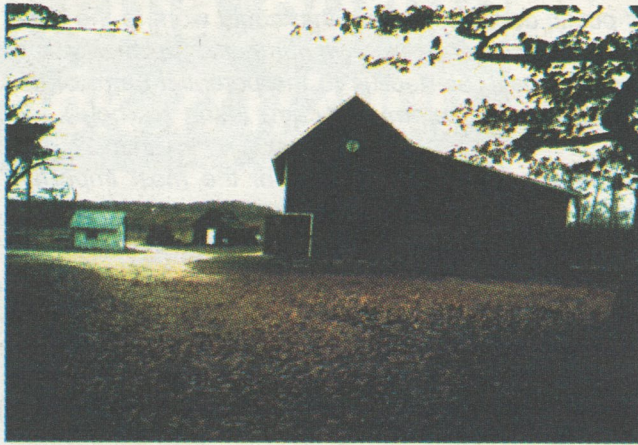
2. MODERN EFFORTS & PERSONALITIES

2.1 The First Subdivisions

The last 25 years has seen a phenomenal population growth in the Grand Traverse area; this growth has resulted in a tremendous expansion of residential housing in Peninsula Township. Anticipating some of the growth of the region, the Township passed its first comprehensive Master Plan in 1972 (Peninsula Township 1972). An important part of the master plan was to manage residential growth in agricultural zones. Because large lot zoning "appeared" to be a reasonable deterrent to residential growth in the early 1970's, a five-acre minimum lot size in agricultural zones was established in the Master Plan.

Between 1970 and 1980, the township's population grew 45 percent. One of the first effects of this growth was seen along the southern shoreline of the Peninsula in areas of low inherent productivity for stone fruits. However, by 1975, developers were beginning to convert higher, more productive areas with good agricultural conditions to satisfy new residents. In 1974, the sale of two farms on some of the best cherry-growing

land in the southern part of the township occurred. The farms, owned by Victor Friday and Elmer Warren, were converted to two subdivisions, Horizon Hills and Harbor View, with close to 300 residents.



2.2 The Bluffs Controversy

From 1976 to 1987, a series of proposals for a subdivision known as "The Bluffs" created greater concern about development and its impacts. When township officials approved rezoning agricultural land on a substantial area in the central part of the peninsula to build the "Bluffs" development, local residents strongly opposed the board.

Public concern was so great that residents overturned the Township Board rezoning in a 1977 referendum. A new advocacy group called "Protect the Peninsula (PTP)" emerged from the controversy. PTP became active in informing citizens about upcoming rezoning proposals.

In 1981, a second proposal called the "Bluffs II" generated opposition from shoreline owners, who joined PTP members in overturning the rezoning in a second referendum vote. Finally, in 1987, developers for Bluffs III applied for a special use permit to allow a golf course, a commercial area and an extensive housing development. The township board approved the special use permit, but PTP filed suit against the township and developer. The special use permit expired during the litigation, and the project died before it could break ground.

The fallout from the Bluffs controversies greatly affected the makeup of the Township Board. Three new board members were sworn into office in 1988, including Rob Manigold the township supervisor, on a preservation platform. The township planning position became fulltime and was occupied by Rob Manigold's appointment, Gordon Hayward. Both of these individuals continue to fill their respective positions today.

2.3 Murray Farms

From 1980 to 1990, the township grew another 13 percent in population. Meanwhile, the cherry industry was experiencing conditions of oversupply and poor markets. Strong economic undertows were putting many farms at risk in the township. One of the largest contiguous farms was the Murray Farm, a 507-acre parcel located at the northern tip of the Old Mission Peninsula. In 1988, the bank foreclosed on Dave Murray, the owner of the property, and the property was prepared to go on the market. With 8,000 feet of shoreline and vistas of both east and west Grand Traverse Bay, it was prime for development.

At that time, Mark Nadolski solicited the help of the American Farmland Trust, an organization founded in 1980 to protect the nation's agricultural resources. AFT purchased the land for \$2.1 million dollars, and held the property until the State of Michigan could purchase it for a new state park. Thus, the potential for 100 additional residential lots was never realized.

From 1968 to 1989, the township lost 1,100 acres of agricultural land to residential development.

2.4 Underwood Farms

By 1990, the township was realizing that its large lot zoning regulation of 5 acres was ineffective in curbing growth, and other measures had to be enacted. With the near loss of the Murray Farm to development, the township decided to update its Master Plan. The challenge was to protect farmland and scenic views while establishing areas that would best support residential development. With help from Michigan State University, the Rotary Charities, and the Michigan Coastal Zone Management program, the Township pursued updating its Master Plan.

To insure that the Plan would have citizen support, the township undertook a number of activities. One of the activities involved surveying 20 of the township's largest landowners on their views regarding the future of agriculture on the Peninsula. Joanne Westphal from Michigan State University was hired to conduct the interviews, which included a battery of questions ranging from factors affecting farming on the Old Mission Peninsula to knowledge relating to conserva-

tion easement, purchase of development rights, and transfer of development rights as alternatives to current zoning regulations.

The Township also initiated a mail survey to all township residents. This survey solicited perceptions of township growth, appropriate land uses, and acceptable alternatives to current zoning regulations. A telephone survey subsequently was carried out by a private consulting firm on the feasibility of funding a Purchase of Development Rights program through a property tax increase.

While the survey activities were occurring, citizen groups were formed to offer recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Commission in terms of new ordinances and/or amendments to existing ordinances affecting farmland preservation, business development, resource management, and residential growth. From the citizen groups, a very progressive set of recommendations emerged concerning farmland preservation. From these recommendations, a four part Agricultural Plan was developed. This plan called for a Purchase of Development Rights program, a Transfer of Development Rights Program, a New Town Development, and a facilitated Planned Unit Development program. All four parts of the plan were viewed as essential to preserving farmland, scenic vistas, and open space. The Agricultural Preservation Plan became a mainstay in the new comprehensive Master Plan for the township.



Before the township could put the Agricultural Preservation Plan into place, a number of factors precipitated the sale and consolidation of three farms in the southern part of the peninsula into Underwood Farms. This subdivision was scheduled to occupy the significant view shed that is experienced when one travels north on M-37 and crosses the apex of Carpenter Hill. Sometimes called "the Gateway to the Peninsula", development of the site as proposed was destined to have a tremendous impact on the perceptual ambiance of the peninsula as a rural landscape. Therefore, the township with the help of PTP and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy went to work securing funds for conservation easements from a number of sources, including the recently passed PDR program for the township. The end result was that about 1/3 of the proposed lots were developed, and a significant part of the view shed was preserved as a result of citizen involvement.

2.5 Purchase of Development Rights Program (PDR)

Work on the Purchase of Development Rights Program (PDR) as an ordinance commenced shortly after the recommendation of the citizen's committee went before the Planning and Zoning Commission. Among the tasks to be completed in preparation for the program were: 1) to establish criteria for selecting PDR properties; 2) define viewsheds for protection under the program; 3) define the agricultural preservation zone; and 4) identify potential property owners interested in participating in the program.

Another citizen committee was formed to help define viewsheds while township officials and Zoning Commission members defined criteria for prioritizing properties entering the PDR program. The township planner defined the agricultural preservation zone and sought participants for the PDR program. One farmer on the peninsula (Walter Johnson) was very interested in the program and offered to serve as the initial program participant. The willingness of Walter to serve as the first program participant was instrumental in getting other farmers and large landowners to volunteer their property for the program.

Because Peninsula Township is not a charter township, it was ineligible for floating a bond issue; therefore, the township had few options at its discretion to fund the program. It decided that a referendum vote of the citizens for a millage increase of 1.25 mills over 15 years appeared to be the most feasible alternative. Two activities became the focus of the PDR effort—the first to secure passage of the PDR ordinance and the second to secure funding for the ordinance.

Because township officials cannot actively pursue the passage and/or funding of a referendum item, a third citizen committee was formed to lobby the township board on the behalf of the ordinance and to launch a successful education campaign to secure

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What you need to know about Amendment 128 abc...(continued from page 2)

Agricultural Preservation League were willing to launch such accusations in an effort to delay closure on the referendum and to cast doubt as to its legitimacy. What they failed to realize is that a referendum is an exercise in democratic process. The referendum was called so that all residents of the township could exercise their right to vote on an amendment that could significantly alter agriculture and life on this narrow band of land.

• How could township government pass such a poor amendment? In retrospect, this amendment would probably not pass either the Planning and Zoning Commission or the Town board today. Many of the provisions discussed in this newsletter only became apparent after the amendment was passed by the Town Board. Occasionally, in local government, critical issues that can affect the vast majority of voters go unnoticed until some precipitating force exposes them for public scrutiny. Unfortunately, in our society today, many indi-

viduals are not able to keep abreast of current township policy. Fortunately, a few individuals have been aware of public decision making that could work to the detriment of all citizens. We owe our thanks to those valiant few who have alerted us to the potential harm of this amendment (an alarm that came in the 11th hour).

Summary. These are a few of the most important points that we need to think about when we enter the voting booth on August 8, 2000. The questions are not raised to create false impressions or to produce scare tactics relating to Amendment 128 abc. Rather, they are legitimate concerns that a community committed to wise land stewardship and quality of life should (and must) address. Special interests will attempt to change some of the basic attributes of life that we possess and seek to protect in our beautiful environment. Anti-growth is not an issue here; anti-business is not an

issue here. We have plenty of vacant commercially zoned areas in the township for retail sales of products to occur. We do not have to confuse our current zoning ordinances as to what is agriculture, residential, and commercial land use.

Stand up and be counted as members of a community that prides itself in a vision that embraces healthy lifestyles and agricultural pursuits. The future is ours if we care to protect it. Vote NO on Amendment 128 abc. A much better ordinance can be written that will benefit the agricultural community and residents of Old Mission Peninsula.

Written by Joanne Westphal, Concerned Citizen & Farm Owner on the Peninsula

East Shore Controversy is Unnecessary in Today's Standards of Planning...

by Joanne M. Westphal, Associate Professor, Landscape Architecture Program, Michigan State University

Residential development as proposed on East Shore Drive occurs when uninformed citizens and township officials assume that no other alternative to site design is possible. However, the work of Randolph Arendt (*Conservation Subdivision Design*, 1996) and many New Town architects have shown that residential subdivisions can be clustered to provide excellent housing opportunities while retaining 60% or more of the land in open space. As a township, we need to consider this type of subdivision design as the standard for development on the Old Mission Peninsula. Not only would this preserve valuable open space, but it would reduce infrastructure costs for the developer, while providing lower lot costs to the homeowner. Other communities throughout the country are moving toward this type of development, and in the process are saving significant amounts of open space in their areas.

Wineries are not the solution to open space preservation, you are...support an expanded PDR.



Loss of orchards often follow shore development and expansion up slopes to create viewsites.

Don't confuse motion for progress...they are distinctly different...

ALTERNATIVES TO PRESENT DEVELOPMENT

Wineries are not the solution to present-day growth on the Old Mission Peninsula. Many of the wineries that we visit today are the direct result of our tax-dollars. Programs such as our township's Purchase of Development Rights Program and the state's PDR program have preserved many of the acres surrounding our present-day wineries on the peninsula. When one considers that Amendment 128 will only prevent a maximum of two houses per 15 acre parcel of Ag1 land, then it is hard to justify the potential creation of hundreds of retail wine stores along Center Road and our other thoroughfares. If we want to preserve agriculture out here, we must find ways to protect those farmers that own and manage over 95 % of the acreage in orchards, woodlots, and field crops. Wineries account for less than 5% of our farmland and open space. To allow them to expand at the expense of other segments of the farm community is unfair. Let's give credit where credit is due...to the real farmers...the cherry growers on the Peninsula.

Old Mission Historic Land Use and Stewardship...(continued from page 8)

passage of the referendum vote to fund the ordinance. John Wunsch, native son and local musician, chaired all of the citizen committees that surrounded PDR. Therefore, it seemed appropriate that he chair the last committee to fund it, which he graciously agreed to do. Hundreds of hours of work went into the effort to create the ordinance and subsequently fund it through referendum. In the end, on May 4, 1994, the township board approved the ordinance, and on August 2, 1994, the voters passed the referendum.

A fourth citizen committee was formed to oversee the administration of the PDR program, and this time, John Wunsch excused himself to return to professional practice. It took over five years for it to complete its work as overseer of the program.

3 FUTURE VISIONS

Many avenues exist on the horizon for residents of the Old Mission Peninsula. The path that we chose through the election of township officials and the support of certain ordinances will determine the quality of life that we will experience in the future. Good planning must go beyond the short-term special interests of certain individuals on the Peninsula. It must address the collective interests and benefit of all residents for all times. Therefore, each of us needs to identify what factors contribute to the uniqueness of the Old Mission Peninsula...and how can we work towards protecting those factors within township government. Secondly, we need to identify those individuals from among the ranks of residents that can help us articulate the goals and objectives that will serve as common unifying themes for all residents. And third, we need to elect township officials who will facilitate the goals and objectives set by the residents.

Among important issues relating to land use planning will be an expansion of the Purchase of Development Rights program to include a second round. Many individuals feel this is essential to secure enough farmland and open space for future generations (presently 1,100 acres of farmland have been preserved by the

first round of PDR). Another important issue is mandatory cluster subdivision development. For several years, local communities on the east and west coasts have used this method to protect sensitive or historic areas of a property while allowing development to reach its zoned density. We are in a very sensitive ecosystem. Why are we allowing developers to chop these ecosystems into 1-5 acre lots without regard to the ecosystem or surrounding developments? Planning tools have been tested elsewhere that have proved successful, but here we are continuing to permit outdated subdivision layout. A third issue important to residents is transfer of development rights. The state legislature has narrowly defeated legislation that would permit local government to pass TDRs within their jurisdictions. Shouldn't we be anticipating this in the future? We could have a well-thought out program, ready to implement, that complements our Agricultural Preservation Plan when enabling legislation is passed. Isn't that better than trying to concoct one at the last minute when developers and special interest groups demand it? Other issues demanding vision are architectural and landscaping standards? Do we want them as a township? What are the advantages and disadvantages? Do they really deny individual rights of personal expression and/or create mundane environments of sameness? Or do they insure that none of us have to look at poorly conceived, difficult to market properties after the original owner moves on?

This is the year to begin thinking about the future of the Peninsula and to insure that you and your children have a beautiful, peaceful, and nurturing place to live. The decision is yours...we hope you will get involved.

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PENINSULA TOWNSHIP IS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE...LET'S KEEP IT SAFE FOR OUR CHILDREN & OURSELVES