

*Early Days In Petoskey Recalled By Pioneer
R. H. Little*

*Petoskey In The Making
Reminiscences of 1873 & 1874*

EARLY DAYS IN PETOSKEY RECALLED BY PIONEER

R. H. LITTLE OF WATERTOWN,
MASS., WRITES STORY FOR
PETOSKEY EVENING NEWS.

Recalls Many Interesting Happenings Here
In the Years of 1873 and 1874. Was One
Of Few White Persons in Region

The following very interesting story of the interesting happenings in Petoskey during those real early pioneer days of 1873 and 1874 has been prepared especially for the Petoskey Evening News by R. H. Little, of Watertown, Mass., who was one of the few white persons in this region during those early years.

Mr. Little has termed his story "Petoskey in The Making" or "Reminiscences of the Winter of 1873-74." The old pioneers of today now enjoy telling their grand children the stories that were told them by their parents of these exciting and terrible periods in the history of Petoskey. But the children can hardly realize that this hub of the Michigan summer resort, the heart of the northern industrial and farming region, and the heart of the Winter Sports activities, was one time a wild wilderness, with few white families.

The story tells of the early doings of those pioneers, the Rose family, the Ingalls family, and others whose names are still household words. It explains the building of the first dock, the first hotel, the coming of the railroad, the famine period, the sickness and trying times among the Indians and many other things about early life on Little Traverse Bay.

The story follows:

PETOSKEY IN THE MAKING

Reminiscences of the Winter of
1873 and 1874

by R. H. LITTLE

During the summer of 1873 I visited my brother Dr. W. Little, who was practicing medicine, at Reed City, Michigan.

This place was about two years old, and much of the townsite had its original growth of forest on it, and only sections of the streets here and there had the tree stumps removed.

The F. & P. M. railway had recently been constructed to Ludington and the G. R. & I. railway was pushing its way through to Little Traverse Bay, and train service had been established during the year to Traverse City.

There was much rivalry between the several town developments along the line towards the north each claiming superior advantages in the way of business prospects, but it was generally agreed that the point on Little Traverse Bay, where the railway would touch would make a more desirable townsite than any of those along the line.

My brother and I decided to visit this point and investigate its possibilities for business, going by way of Traverse City, and thence by boat to Charlevoix, the end of the boat line.

We took a stroll around the village which had then quite a number of buildings, the principal ones being Dick Coopers hotel, and Fox, Rose & Buttars general store.

Here we found a barge being loaded with merchandise for a store that this firm had recently opened at Bear River.

We engaged passage on it, and shortly after proceeded on our way, being towed by a tug.

H. O. Rose and three other men were on the barge with us, and we sat around on the cargo and admired the scenery as we slowly passed along not far from shore, which was fringed with a dense forest, and the only cleared open space to be seen on the way was at Indian Village, an Indian settlement about halfway to Bear River.

Mr. Rose gave us valuable information regarding the business outlook of the Bear River locality and about where the railway was expected to touch the bay.

When we came within view of the dock at Bear River darkness set in and when we landed there was quite a number of people on the dock - most of them being Indians.

They proceeded at once to unload the barge so it could be taken back to Charlevoix that night, and the doctor and I were guided ashore to a small building where we engaged rooms for the night and had a lunch.

We secured very little sleep during the night, owing to the noise and racket caused by the drunken men and the tolling of a bell.

We arose early in the morning as we were anxious to have a look at our surroundings.

Our lodging house was in a group with three others, one of them a small mission church, with a bell mounted between two posts near the door.

The merchandise on the dock was being hauled to the store and we followed a wagon load of it on a trail toward the east for about half a mile and turned in at Grandfather Petoskey's residence which was quite a large building, and in which Mr. Rose had secured two rooms for his store.

Stan Carter was manager of the store and could speak the Indian language and was accustomed to trading with them.

We then proceeded along the trail toward the east and crossed over the Bear river bridge and on up the hill to where two of Petoskey's sons resided with their families in log houses a few hundred feet apart.

They had quite a few acres cleared along the hillside, but patches of small trees had grown up here and there on it, and only cultivated a small garden patch near the dwellings.

This was the eastern limit of the Bear River settlement and where Petoskey was afterwards plotted.

Mr. Rose owned the land adjoining the Petoskey farm on its east side and it extended along the shore for about a mile and on the east end of this land a town site had been platted and it was surmised that the railway would have its terminus there.

We returned to the hotel for lunch much impressed with what we had seen and the prospect of it being a good place to embark in business and decided to remain in the locality at least for a time and be on hand when the town would be located.

After spending another night at the hotel, with a repetition of the noise and drunken racket of the previous night we concluded to look for other quarters. As we could not find a desirable place we purchased a tent and camp outfit, and made our camp in a small grassy spot surrounded by a grove of maples and near where the Pere Marquette railway station is now located.

The trail leading up the steep hill nearby, and on away around the bay was between our camp and the shore.

Bear River at that time followed a little back of the shore line and discharged into the lake near our camp.

We were quite comfortable in our new abode, and glad to have escaped from the noise at the hotel, but sometimes we were awakened at night by Indians yelling as they galloped past on their ponies, and also by wild animals trying to get at our food supplies.

It only required a few days to explore all there was of the Bear River settlement.

The main part of it lay about a half mile south from the dock. Here the Ingalls family lived and had a general store. There was several boys in the family and they could speak the Indian language. They had dammed the river at this point to run a saw mill, but it was then not in operation.

The road turned west at the Ingalls place and led on through between small tracts of cleared land and houses occupied by the Indians and was the most populated part of the settlement. A road branched off from this and led up the hill to the mission house and school established by Rev. Andrew Porter many years before.

Elder Porter had his residence nearby, also Mr. Germain who was manager of the mission farm.

They had quite a large acreage cleared and cultivated.

We attended services at this mission several times before winter set in and it was quite a novel experience hearing a sermon delivered a few words at a time, and then one of the Petoskey sons who had attended Oberlin College, Ohio, would repeat it in Indian.

The hymn books had English on one page and Indian on the opposite.

The Indians sang very well and appeared very devout.

As a rule they were good lawabiding citizens and could be depended on.

I am not sure if they were naturally inclined this way or not, but if it were caused through the teachings of Elder Porter, he certainly accomplished a good work amongst them and left his mark.

Bear Creek had a weekly mail service and Elder Porter was postmaster.

The workmen who were clearing the railway right-of-way, were now beginning to be within walking distance and many of them walked into obtain booze, and have a spree and it was these men who had disturbed our sleep at the hotel and not our citizens.

There was considerable sickness among the construction gangs out along the line, and when it became known that there was a doctor in the settlement, men would walk in for treatment and the doctor often walked out to treat those unable to walk.

The trail through the forest was along the center row of grade stakes put in by the engineers, and was rather rough to walk on.

This business was not anticipated, so the doctor ordered a stock of medicines to meet this demand and created the first drug store in town.

During this time the doctor visited his wife and baby, May, at Reed City, and one day a half drunken Indian called to have four

teeth in his upper jaw extracted. He had been in a fight and the teeth were quite loose. I could not make him understand that I was not the doctor, but he insisted that I should pull them, and realizing that it would not do to let him go without making an attempt I managed to extract them without much effort. I may lay claim of being the first dentist in town.

The railway engineers moved into town about this time and made their camp back on the hill above our camp.

The only names of members of the staff that I can recall to memory, are Warren Stimson, and the brothers John and Henry Keep.

I had been the only white person living in town when the doctor was away and this increase in population added much to our social life.

It was now along in October and the engineers had completed the railway survey and then the long looked for survey of town lots began, and the doctor and I purchased the first lots sold and were located at the corner of Lake Street and Railway Avenue.

We planned to build a hotel on these lots and immediately set to work to procure building material before navigation for the season would close.

The doctor went to Traverse City and chartered a steamer and had it loaded with building material, and on coming near to Little Traverse Bay quite a storm was on, and darkness had set in when they had reached the dock at Little Traverse (now Harbor Springs).

I had procured a barge from H. O. Rose and had it ready at the dock with a gang of Indians, and we began at once to transfer the lumber from the steamer to it, as the captain wanted it all ready to tow it across to Petoskey early in the morning.

When about half the cargo was on the barge, it suddenly sank almost to the waters edge. This placed us in a rather serious predicament so we held a consultation and decided to keep piling the balance on top of the other, and secured it by stringing rope back and forth over the top and having fastened at each end of the barge.

In the morning we found the storm had increased and we were compelled to remain there all day.

The following morning we pulled out and as we rounded the point ran into quite a heavy sea. I was alone on the barge and it kept me busy preventing loose boards from being washed away by the action of the waves beating against the side, and sometimes they would sweep over the cargo.

As the barge drew more water than the steamer it made slow headway and it was near noon when they came within a safe distance of the shore and cast off the tow lines, and allowed me to drift

toward the shore and it soon became stranded some distance out.

By this time the storm had considerably subsided, and Hibbard Ingalls had a gang on the beach with Mackinaw boats and they came out and commenced to transfer the cargo ashore and by nightfall had it all on the beach.

A tug boat came the next day from Charlevoix for the barge and returned from there with all our dimension lumber.

It was a slow tedious job hauling from the beach to the building site, as only small loads could be taken up the hill.

During this time and the railway was being graded through the town site and track laid to the end of the line just north of Division Street.

We had built a temporary residence for the winter and the doctor went to Reed City and returned with his wife and child, May, and also Mr. Lincoln, a carpenter whom he had engaged for the winter. His horse and household goods were shipped by car, and was the first car of freight to enter Petoskey and the last for the season, for the railway construction was suspended until spring.

We surely enjoyed living in a house again and to have someone prepare the meals, for it had become disagreeably cold for camping.

By this time Mr. Rose had his new store constructed a block south of our place, and the merchandise removed from the Petoskey building. He had also constructed a residence toward the east of us, but it was not occupied until spring.

We managed to get the foundation for the hotel in before the ground became deeply frozen, and we built a shop in which to work during the stormy weather.

A rather tragic event occurred about this time. An elderly couple who had been running a camp several miles down the line during construction work had bought a piece of land a mile or so east of town, and had put up a shack on it.

They moved their belongings in on a railway push car with the assistance of two men, and when they reached the end of the track they camped for the night and built a big fire from logs, and sat around it drinking whiskey before retiring.

The wife arose during the night and fell into the fire, and her screams for help awoke the others and one of them came for the doctor, and when he reached her he saw that she was so severely burned that he could do nothing to save her life, so he administered something to ease the pain and she passed away in a few hours, and was buried in the woods nearby.

An epidemic of spinal meningitis broke out among the Indians during

the winter, and several of them died. It was a different matter to treat the Indians during the winter, and several of them died. It was a different matter] to treat the Indians, as they could not fully understand the instructions given them for the care of the patient.

The doctor made several professional visits to Cross Village. These long trips were very trying on his health, and were made on horseback.

With all his practice there was scarcely enough money taken in to pay for the medicine supplied, but he felt that it was his duty to carry on, and do what he could to relieve the sick and suffering.

I made a short visit to Canada in January. The 70 miles to Traverse City was a long monotonous journey requiring two days to make it, as there was little traffic especially at our end of the road.

Our fuel supply was obtained close at hand in the woods along the hillside, and we sure required a plentiful supply, for our dwelling was built in such a hurry, was none too warm, and soon after we retired to bed, the rooms became about as cold as the outdoors. But notwithstanding all this, we all enjoyed good health.

Only five white families resided in the settlement along the whole south side of the bay.

Being so steadily occupied we had no time for social activities, and it was just as well that we had so much work to do, for it served to make the time pass much faster, then it would otherwise.

It was rather a trying experience for my sister-in-law, but she stood the strain bravely.

My little niece May was a great aid in helping to cheer and amuse us.

Mr. Lincoln, the head carpenter felt the isolation keenly, and was often homesick for his family at Reed City.

It was during the winter evenings that I set the type for the first paper published in Petoskey. I ran short of some type, and was unable to finish the first page, and not having paper did not go to press until the following August.

Being so near the forest we could hear on severe frosty nights the constant popping noise of the trees and the distant rumbling and groaning of the ice on the bay.

Our dwelling was so surrounded by trees that we had a narrow view of the distance away to the west over the bleak, dreary waste of ice, and a portion of the shoreline along toward the Bear River dock.

The doctor had applied to the postal authorities for a postoffice to be opened at Petoskey and he was appointed postmaster, and I had obtained my naturalization papers and was appointed deputy. When the papers came in March, the doctor and I drove over to Elder Porter's and returned with all the papers pertaining to the office and the mail in our overcoat pockets.

Thus the Bear River P. O. went out of existence and Petoskey was ushered in.

We had erected a small addition to the north end of the hotel for the post office and in it we also carried a stock of drugs and medicines.

The inhabitants of the settlement had very little ready money, and business was done by barter and exchange, and about the only employment to be obtained was cutting cord wood and hauling it to the dock for shipment and the labor paid for in supplies at the store.

Towards spring Mr. Rose brought in men and teams, and began the building of a dock. The timber being so close at hand, they made rapid progress with the work, and had it completed several weeks before the arrival of the first train.

This dock was necessary for the boat line which was to connect with the train service, and make the round trip to Mackinac Island each day.

The John A. Dix, a sidewheeler, was the first boat on this service. Up until 1874 all of Emmet county was held as an Indian reservation and all those who had not already obtained their allotment of land, it was then given them, and the balance was thrown open for homestead entry.

A municipal election was held in April. Elder Porter had been supervisor for years, and he and one other man, were the only white members of the council.

There were two parties in the field for election, Elder Porter and the doctor heading each for the office of supervisor.

The election was held at the Mission school house.

There was no registered list of voters, so it was open to any male person of age who desired to vote.

The tickets were all written on slips of paper, and several persons were kept busy writing for those who were unable to write.

Hibbard Ingalls was manager ~~manager~~ for the doctor's party.

The doctor and his party were elected by a large majority. They realized that with the coming of the railway, and the influx of settlers that were expected to follow, good heads would be needed to handle affairs.

Construction work on a hotel had been steadily kept up and towards the end of March was all ready for plastering.

A lime kiln was made on the side of the hill near our old camp and limestone collected from along the stone bluff with a sleigh on the ice.

Plastering sand was hauled from Little Traverse Point on the ice.

So far we had obtained our water supply by melting snow and ice, and sometimes it was carried from the stream at the end of the line.

We then began to dig a well, and engaged Frank Petoskey to do the digging, and on digging down 20 feet came to stone and there being no indication of water, work on it was suspended for the time being.

The day before quitting work on the well, the hoisting rope broke and the bucket of dirt crashed to the bottom. The man and I who worked the windlass were horrified and at first were afraid to look down as no sound came from below, and we fully expected that Frank was crushed beneath the bucket, but on looking down we were overjoyed to see him calmly looking up at us.

Water for plastering was then obtained from the stream at the end of the line by means of the railway push car on which barrels were placed and a horse was motive power.

It was late spring and the boat that was expected to bring in food supplies was prevented by the ice which showed little indication of moving out of the bay.

The supply of provisions had become so low that the people were afraid that they might become exhausted before a new supply would come. The road to Charlevoix was impassable with the deep soft snow.

We thought some might be obtained at Boyne Falls and I joined a party of three men to pump the railway hand car there but on going about two miles found the track covered with snow and ice.

We had been informed that they could spare some supplies at Little Traverse, but owing to the dangerous condition of the ice, it was rather risky to cross.

The doctor and another man volunteered to go across, and they arrived there and got what they could easily carry, but on their return journey they had to follow along great cracks to find a place to jump over them.

There was an anxious crowd on the dock watching them and all felt greatly relieved when they managed to get on land without any mishap. The provisions they secured helped to keep us going for a few days more and then the ice moved out of the bay and the supply boat came in and brought along Mr. and Mrs. H. O. Rose and daughter Abbie.

It was such a relief for us all to see the snow and ice disappear and to get into the woods and pick the wild flowers that soon appeared. We felt the need of a change and something to amuse and entertain us after being shut out from the outer world so long.

One Sunday the Rose family and our family took the push car to cut south of their store and coasted to the end of the track. This was repeated a couple of times and greatly enjoyed.

The hotel was finished and furnished and a sign put up calling it the Rose Hotel.

We had moved into it, and all were awaiting the long looked for appearance of the first train.

When it did arrive we were over-crowded with guests and it was a constant worry for weeks to find sleeping places for them all.

The trains that followed each day brought in a steady flow of tourists and others looking for business locations and other ventures.

Car loads of building materials came, and houses under construction could be seen scattered all over the town site. Some were for hotel accommodations, and in a few weeks time we became relieved of our crowded condition, and began to erect an addition to our hotel.

When I beheld all this building activity and compared the prices they paid for materials, and the ease in which they obtained it, with what ours cost, and the hardships that we had endured in placing it on the ground, I had my doubts as to whether we had gained by pioneering.

After all there was some compensating pleasure in the thought that it was through our energy and resources that we were enabled to offer some accommodation and shelter to those who came, for otherwise they would have had to undergo some of the privations that we had experienced.

I visited my brothers widow, Mrs. T. Kirkland in 1901 and viewed the great changes that had taken place since I had left there in 1876, but the view of the locality with its beautiful romantic setting as I first beheld it, is the one that is most vividly impressed on my mind.

There may be but few persons alive today who had lived in the Petoskey locality during the time embraced in this narrative. If there is I trust that this will be of special interest to them, and recall to memory some of the incidents stated, and the names of those who had laid the foundation for the city of Petoskey.

This material has been proof-read. Spelling has been corrected for the most part; however, several words were not changed, but remain as printed in the original copy.