

**Early Days in Petoskey**  
**By**  
**Henry McConnell**

# EARLY DAYS IN PETOSKEY

By HENRY McCONNELL

WALLOON LAKE

## The Kalkaska Leader

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The year 1873 was a memorable one for the **Little Traverse region**. In this year **Petoskey** was born, found a place on the map, was recognized by the fourth estate, and entered upon her career of fame and fortune. Is it too early to suggest that the semi-centennial of **Petoskey's** birth might be fittingly celebrated by a widely advertised home-coming celebration in 1923?

**Petoskeyites** are home-lovers, and such a celebration would appeal to them. No matter where they fare or how far they wander, they always have a warm feeling in their hearts for old **Petoskey**. Then why not get together in 1923? Let us, to use an old expression, "*talk it over with Brown,*" and the suggestion may lead to something.

### Indian Field in 1873

In July of 1873 the site of **Petoskey** was an **Indian field**, bounded by the river, the bay, and the hills. It was overgrown with June grass, uncultivated except for a small plot about where the **Petoskey Wholesale Grocery** now stands. This plot was planted to potatoes. Here also was a small house of logs; another was on the site of the **Ramedell Block**, while a third was on the bluff, at the site of the **Union Depot**. These were occupied by **Indians**.

On the beach east of the river lay the dock and storehouse of **H.O. Rose**, built the previous year. Up the river of the site of the paper mill was the mill of **Hazen Ingalls**. He had a store and a small clearing set out mainly to fruit trees. Here too was a saloon operated by **Jackson Ingalls**.

Farther south, at the edge of the upper plateau, stood the **mission school** of **Andrew Porter**. Here was an extensive, cultivated clearing. The **post office**, **Bear River**, was at the **mission**. **Mr. Porter** being postmaster. The river was crossed near its mouth by a log bridge.

West along the beach was the **Indian Village**, centered about a **log chapel** and its **cemetery**, each grave bearing a wooden cross decorated with bright cloth or ribbons. The **mission** was served by the priest stationed at **Little Traverse**. On the parish records this was known as the mission of **Agaming**, the chapel being **St. Paul's**, erected some time in the '30s. Here, early in June of 1859, the venerable **Bishop Baraga** officiated in the chapel and said mass in the house of **Joseph Trottrechaud**, who had given an acre of ground of the erection of a new church, which, evidently, was never built.

### City Active Warrior

**Pitasige**, as the name then written, was the head man of the village. During the **War of 1812** he, in common with the other **Ottawas** of **Michigan**, espoused the **British** cause, assisting at the capture of **Fort Mackinac** and fighting gallantly in the battle of the following year when the **Americans** failed disastrously to recapture it. So bitter were the **Ottawas** against the **Americans**, that after peace was proclaimed **Colonel McDonal**, **British** commander at **Mackinac**, himself went to the **Arbre Croche villages**, persuading them to keep the peace.

After the war **Petoskey**, then a resident of one of the **Arbre Croche villages**, removed with his clan to the mouth of **Bear River**. The village, known as **Akatchaming**, was never a large one. The **Indian** census of the '40s and '50s give the population as from 40 to 75 souls. In 1873 there were only about 15 log houses in the village.

In August of 1873 the railroad grading began. The iron gang followed closely, so that early in October the last rail was laid and the whistle of a locomotive heard for the first time in **Petoskey**. Before November 1<sup>st</sup> the ballasting was done and the road practically finished.

Some few of the workers remained for the winter. It was about his time that the wife of **William McCloud** fell into a fire and received mortal burns; this accident gave **Petoskey** her first mention in the columns of a newspaper. The **Morning Democrat**, **Grand Rapids**, gives an account of this in its local columns under date of November 15, 1873. the press had overlooked a prior happening during August, when a skiff landed on the beach bearing a man and a boy, the former in a dying condition. He was buried by the railroad hands, cast of the grade, where it now crosses **Emmet Street**. A fence was placed around the grave and it was a landmark for some years.

To be continued.....

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**September 17, 1925**

**Continued from last week**

On the evening of November 12 long-drawn-out whistles announced car of the **G. R. & I.**, and the directors' car of the **Pennsylvania Central**. Among the arrivals were **General Cass**, president of the **Pennsylvania**; **Governor Bagley**, the **Talcott brothers**, chief contractors; **P.R.I. Pierce**, of the land department; **Cobb**, State land commissioner; **Wallin** and **O'Rourke**, superintendent of the **G. R. & I.**, and some reporters. One of these proved to be an old school friend of mine, **George Gage**, reporter for the **Grand Rapids Daily Times**.

**George** and I had a short talk. He was not enthusiastic about our town, and small wonder! The ground was covered with a wet, slushy snow; the air was damp, misty and disagreeable, and the prospect unpleasant. **George** thought it might be fine here in summer, and in time the place might be a town, but, I met him some years after, and he had changed his mind.

**Shaw** and **McMillen** had platted the tract of land at rail-head, then enjoyed a controversy with the railroad regarding the right of way. The company refused to build a depot on their plat unless they were given an additional hundred feet of frontage. This necessitated a re-platting, with the result that **H. O. Rose**, who had the advent of the inspection train, which halted at **Lake street**. It consisted of a baggage car, the officials' platted the tract just south, put his plat on record first, under the name of **Petoskey city**. Before this matter was settled **Dave Cushman**, who had begun the erection of the **Cushman House**, was obliged to move the frame 50 feet back from the tracks.

During the fall **Captain Rose** began his store building on **Mitchell street**. The lumber was brought from **Traverse City** by boat. A number of buildings, some temporary shacks, were put up at this time. **Dr. Little** raised the frame of the **Rose House** on **New Year's Day**. This stood on the site of the **Elks' Hall**. He managed it until his death in 1875, when it was sold to **D. C. Bradley** and the name changed to the **Occidental**.

### **Homesteaders Come**

When winter set in, **Petoskey** had a population of 50 or 60. The majority were railroad hands who soon drifted elsewhere. In the following summer I met some of them at work on the **C. S. & C. R.** in **Montcalm county**. A few however, remained and entered

homesteads. The winter was mild, the two saloons did a good business, and at times things were lively. Early in the spring a depot was built on the site of the suburban depot, with **M. F. Quaintance** as agent, and trains made regular trips, one passenger daily each way and a tri-weekly freight. Sometimes it would try weekly, at others it would try weakly. I think **John Hobbins** was the first foreman on this section.

During the winter a petition was circulated to remove the post office from the mission. This was granted, the name was changed to **Petoskey City**, and **Dr. Little** the first postmaster, kept the office in the **Rose House**.

Since those days the growth of **Petoskey** has been slow, steady and substantial. Local option can no longer, thank Heaven, terrify with its threat to stop the tourists; and nothing else can keep **Petoskey** down! It is a far cry from the snow and slush of that first winter, from the ramshackle houses, the pioneering conditions, the discomforts and hardships, to the present beautiful city that crowns the bluffs of Little Traverse Bay, the city that is known throughout the country as the **Summer Queen of the North**.