

# Discovering the history

In 1967, Northwestern Michigan College purchased an eight-acre parcel on West Grand Traverse Bay from Cherry Growers, Inc.

Although it boasted 500 feet of shoreline, the views were hidden by 22 buildings which covered almost every square foot of land.

The history of this site reveals much about the history of the region. Written records began with the white settlers but of course they were not the first people to live here.

"In the 1830s there were at least six bands living in the immediate vicinity of Grand Traverse Bay — four Ottawa and two Chippewa," wrote George Weeks in his 1992 book, "Mem-ka-weh: Dawning of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians."

Then, in 1847 Captain Harry Boardman bought a tract of land at the foot of Grand Traverse Bay, giving his name to the local river and lake. The town grew quickly, with logging businesses growing up along the shore.

"Brewery Sure Thing" was the big headline in the February 10, 1901 Morning Record, announcing that Joseph Gambes of Manistee had bought property on East Front Street (NMC's current property) to build "a substantial structure with a complete equipment for the manufacture of beer."

When Prohibition put the brewery out of business in 1919, the building became Northern Creamery, selling "McCool's Velvet Ice Cream and Gold Coin Creamery Butter."

Although a creamery might be thought to pose fewer health threats than a brewery, one little boy found out otherwise. In 1923, ten-year-old Herbert Kurtz snuck into the

freezer and was locked there for several hours. "Boy Risks Life for Ice Cream" was the headline and he almost paid with his frost-bitten foot — but finally made a full recovery.

At the same time on the same site, cherry and apple processing operations were underway. From 1922 to 1956, the Grand Traverse Packing Company — which became Cherry Growers, Inc. in 1930 — built some 15 buildings. Buildings for receiving, processing, cold storage, warehousing, offices, and mysteri-

chase the site was all fruit processing operations.

It was NMC's goal to create a technical institute at the new location. "While extensive renovations would be required to make it usable for laboratories and classrooms," NMC President Preston Tanis wrote in his history of the college, "the College Trustees agreed that the large amount of floor space, its desirable location, and a purchase price of only \$350,000 were strong points in its favor." ("The First Twenty Years," 1973)

Thus it was that an old

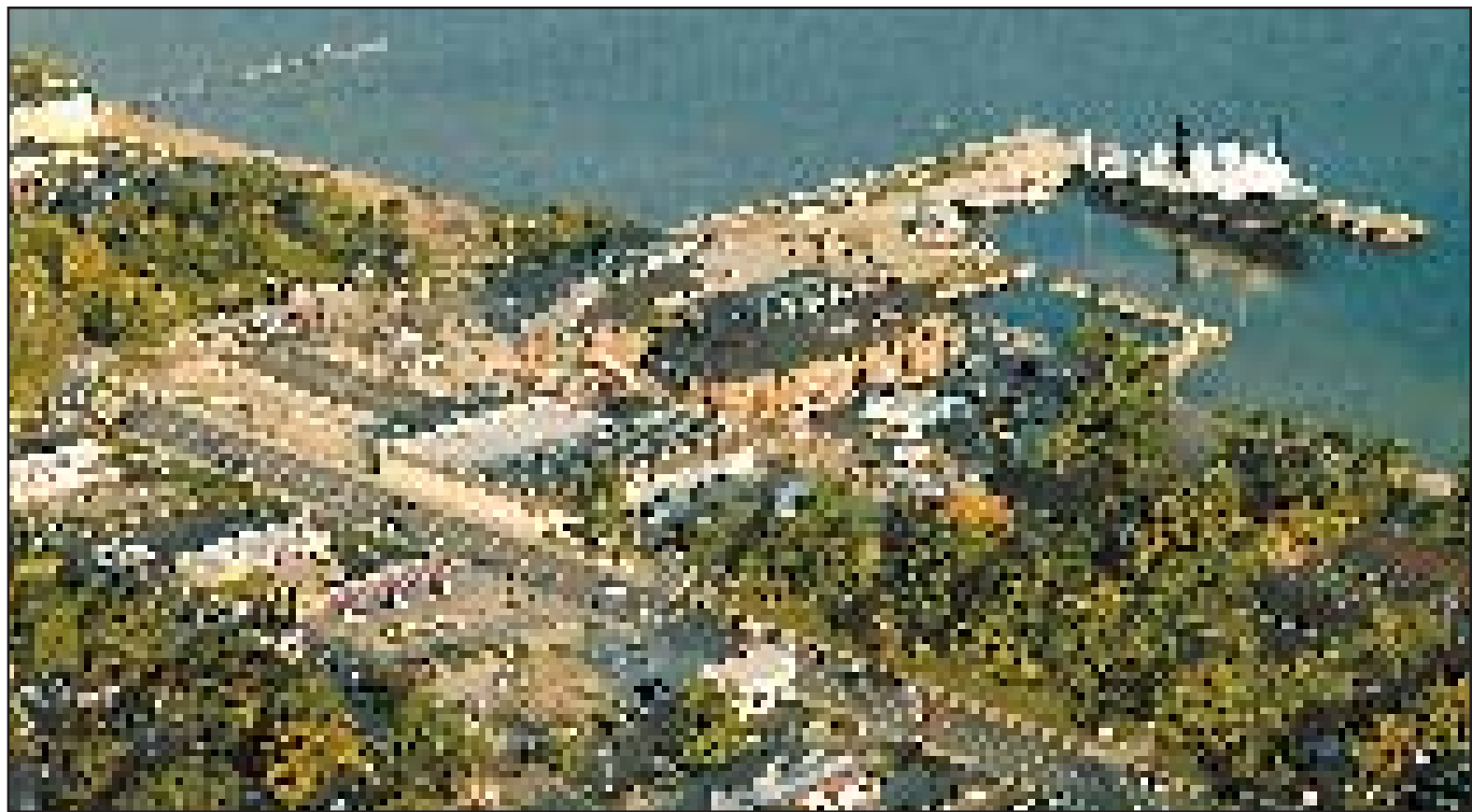


Photo credit (top): NMC Archives; Above: Record-Eagle/John L. Russell

**Top, a southeast view in 1967 when Northwestern Michigan College purchased the property from Cherry Growers. Above, the nearly completed NMC Great Lakes Campus, October, 2003. Within a month, the remaining portion of the "old freezer building" on Front Street will have been demolished. The new campus building will occupy .87 acre, reduced from the 2.7 acres of previous college buildings.**

ous things like "sweet cherry burning."

A 1947 photo shows a row of tourist cabins called "Trav-0-Tell" hanging on along the eastern edge of the property, but by the time of NMC's pur-

chase the site became a new center for data processing technology, career pilot training, auto service technology, electronics, and a maritime school. The Great Lakes Maritime Academy's first

home, in fact, was the old brewery building until it was torn down in 1975.

Renovations notwithstanding, these buildings never fully adapted themselves to educational purposes and the spec-

tacular potential of the waterfront site awaited additional resources.

*Special thanks to NMC's Alan Beer who provided much valuable research for this story.*