

Seeing the light

Old Mackinac Point Station to reopen June 12

BY FORREST KARBOWSKI
Record-Eagle staff writer

MACKINAW CITY— Ever since the Mackinac Bridge opened in 1957, the Old Mackinac Point Light Station has been closed to the public. The lighthouse's beacon could not compete with the bridge's navigation lights, causing the U.S. Coast Guard to decommission the station.

That all changes on June 12, when Mackinac State Historic Parks reopen the station — their first historic site opening in 20 years.

The 112-year-old lighthouse will be a restoration in progress, but it will still serve as a historic museum, displaying interactive exhibits and artifacts from the station's active days, including the original Fresnel lens.

Tours will take visitors through the grounds, into the keeper's quarters and all the way to the top of the castle-like tower. Guides will dress in historic garb while recounting the history of the lighthouse and its keepers.

Chief Curator Steve Brisson said there has been much public interest in the reopening.

"Michigan has more lighthouses than any other state, but many of them are secluded," Brisson said. "This one is right here in one of the busiest tourist areas."

Public interest shows the national importance of lighthouses, he said.

"They are a symbol of America, of lifesaving, of



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Before the Mackinac Bridge was built in 1957, the Old Mackinac Point Light Station served as a guide for travelers on the straits. The station will reopen on June 12.

dramatic stories, and a great part of how America became what it is," Brisson said.

Public relations officer Tim Putman said another appeal is the personal connection visitors feel with lighthouses.

"Besides the fact that it has important history, federal significance, shipwrecks and drama, it's also important because families lived there," Putman said. "We can all connect that to our everyday lives."

Dick Campbell of Mackinaw City lived in the lighthouse from 1944 to 1951 when his father served as keeper. He said the station was much more pleasant to live in than others.

"Anyone who is a child of a lighthouse family knows that it is very similar to the military," he said. "Everything has to be in its place, clean and painted. Still, it was very nice to live in, because the whole family could live together and go to school together."

Campbell has donated artifacts for display, including his father's uniforms

and a mechanism used to rotate the light prior to the availability of electricity.

Along with internal restoration, a small barn is being returned to the property. It will be surrounded by a picket fence like one that surrounded the lighthouse.

Overall, the restoration will cost about \$2 million. Admission and donations are expected to defray some of that cost.

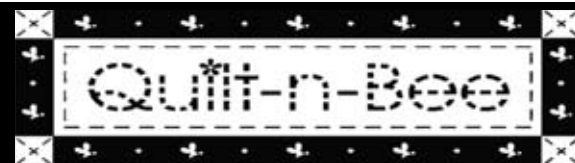
Brisson hopes the restoration will pave the way for more lighthouse preservation in the future.

The grand opening celebration will take place on Saturday, June 26. Events begin at 10 a.m. with a dedication, and continue throughout the day with artist and musician showcases as well as a speech from Brisson.

A dinner cruise aboard the "Straits of Mackinac II" will take participants to Cheboygan for a concert of maritime and regional music featuring Harbor Folk, Claudia Schmidt and Lee Murdock at the historic Cheboygan Opera House, followed by an afterglow.

Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse Grand Opening Celebration

- Tickets for the June 26 dinner cruise are \$75 per person.
- Concert tickets are \$15 for adults, \$10 for children 6-17 and free for children 5 and younger.
- "Beacon" sponsorships are available for \$50, and include recognition at Grand Opening events, a private breakfast and tour of the lighthouse and two dinner cruise and concert tickets.
- Tickets available at MSHP office (436-4100) or the Cheboygan Opera House (627-5841).



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