

## **“REMINISCENCES OF 1873-74 IN PETOSKEY”**

### **R.H. Little’s Story Tells of Bear Creek Before Trains Came**

R. H. Little was in Petoskey from 1873 to 1876 and active in the founding of the community. Sometime after 1901 he wrote in longhand his memories, entitling the article, “Petoskey In The Making- Reminiscence of the Winter of 1873-1874.”

The manuscript has been in the possession of the Evening News and is published herewith, just as Mr. Little wrote it.

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During the summer of 1873 I visited my brother, Dr. W. Little, who was then practicing medicine at Reed City. This place was about two years old and much of the town site had its original growth of forest on it and only sections of the streets here and there had the tree stumps removed.

The E. & P. M. Railway had recently been constructed to Ludington, and the Grand Rapids and Indiana 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 tour would make a more desirable town site than any of those along the line.

#### *Plan Trip North*

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

We took a stroll around Charlevoix which had then quite a number of buildings, the principal ones being Dick Cooper’s hotel and the Fox & Rose 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 barge and admired the scenery as we slowly passed along not far from shore which was fringed with a dense forest. The only cleared, open space to be seen on the way was at Indian Village, an Indian settlement about half way to Bear River.

Mr. Rose gave us valuable information regarding the business outlook of the Bear River locality and told us 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 were quite a number of people on the dock, most of them being Indians.

### *Stay With Indians*

They proceeded at once to unload the barge so that it could be taken 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 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 they only cultivated a small garden patch near their dwellings. This was the eastern limit of the Bear River settlement and where Petoskey was afterwards platted.

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 near where the W. M. (now C & O) 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 store.

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

### *Decide To Stay*

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.

### *See First Mill*

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 were 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 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 Andrew Porter many years before.

Elder Porter had his residence nearby and 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 Petoskey's sons, who had attended Oberlin College, 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, law-abiding citizens and could be depended on.

### *Praises Elder Porter*

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 the postmaster.

The workmen who were clearing the railway right-of-way were now beginning to be within walking distance and many of them walked in to 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 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

### *Doctor Orders Drugs*

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

During this period the doctor visited his wife and baby, May, at Reed City and one day an 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 and he insisted that I should pull them. Realizing that it would not do to let him go without making any attempt, I managed to extract them without much effort. I may lay claim to 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 Stemson 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 the town lots began and the doctor and I purchased the first lots sold.

They were located at the corner of Lake Street and Railway Avenue (now Elk).

### *Plan Hotel*

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 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 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 water's edge. This placed us in rather a 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 them 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.

### *Lighter Lumber Ashore*

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. 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 tugboat 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 building site, as only small loads could be taken up the hill. During this time the railway was being graded through the town site and track laid to the end of line just north of Division Street.

### *Porter Brings Family*

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

By this time Mr. Rose had his new store constructed a block south of our place and the merchandise removed to it 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 stormy weather.

An epidemic of spinal meningitis broke out among the Indians during the winter and several of them died. It was a difficult 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.

### *Good Practice; No Pay*

With all his practice there was scarcely enough money taken 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.

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 that it was none to warm and soon after we retired to bed, the rooms became about as cold as outdoors. But notwithstanding all this, we enjoyed good health.

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

Our dwelling was so surrounded by trees that we only 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 post office to be opened at Petoskey and he was appointed postmaster. 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.

### *Petoskey Begins*

Thus the Bear River post office 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. About the only employment to be obtained was cutting cord wood and hauling it to the dock for shipment. The labor was paid for in supplies at the store.

Towards springs Mr. Rose brought in men and teams and began the building of a dock. The time 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 side-wheeler, 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, received it then, and the balance was thrown open for homestead entry.

### *Porter Elected*

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 the polls were 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 election manager for the doctor's party which was elected by a large majority.

Construction work on the 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 was collected from along the stone bluff with a sleigh on the ice. Plastering sand was hauled from Little Traverse Point going 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 railway.

### *Well Digging Futile*

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

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

It was a 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 could come. The road to Charlevoix was impassable with the deep, soft snow.

We thought some might be obtained a Boyne Falls, and I joined a party of three men to pump the railway hand car there but, on going about two miles, we 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.

### *Bring Food Across Bay*

The doctor and another man volunteered to go across and they arrived there and got what they could easily carry. 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 mishaps. 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. 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 the 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 was 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 overcrowded 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 had 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 accommodations 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 brother's 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 some of those who had laid the foundation for the city of Petoskey.