

## *McGulpin Point Lighthouse*



On a clear blue Mackinaw day, my brother, David, Mom and I made our yearly drive down to McGulpin Point, a few miles west of the Mackinaw Bridge. We enjoy the view and the huge boulders that anchor that northerly

point. Things were happening at the lighthouse on the bluff. Some of the trees and brush had been removed from the hill and the entryway. Workers with ladders and equipment scurried around the lighthouse. Two workers washed the beautiful structure. A sign informed us that the county had secured the lighthouse which had been a private residence. We were delighted to read that restoration was in progress and that the lighthouse was open for touring.

Excited to be walking on the lighthouse grounds, we collectively held great hope as we approached the entrance. Someone had planted yellow daisies in a raised bed bordered by beefy granite stones. A new flagpole graced the yard. A mountain ash displayed red berries at the corner of the structure. The lighthouse looked like it breathed a sigh of pleasure, refreshed from all the attention. The windows sparkled in the late afternoon sun. Yes, the door was open!

Inside we met two local volunteers, Charlie Walters and his wife, Hazel. We told them that yearly for at least a decade, we had rented a cottage on Lakeshore Drive. Of course, they knew locals Bob and Sue Lampi, but could not have known that Jill Lampi Rogers married my son. We were excited to tour the lighthouse that we had only been able to glimpse from the road. Mrs. Walters apologized for the flies in the lantern room. She just could not keep up with the many that gathered there.



We had to smile at her concern. As we toured the three levels, the rest of the interior was spotless.

McGulpin Point Lighthouse went into service in 1869, but was deactivated in 1906. For many years it was a private residence and was not open to the public. In 2005, the property was offered at the price of \$1.5 million; however, because of the economic downturn, it did not sell. In the summer of 2008, Emmet County agreed to purchase the lighthouse for \$720,000. In the next few months, the County replaced the long missing light and lantern room. They began returning the residence portion of the lighthouse into a museum dedicated to the history of the lighthouse and the surrounding McGulpin family land claim. In preparation for the relighting ceremony on May 30, 2009, a swath of trees that had grown for a hundred years between the lighthouse and the lake was cut so that the light could be seen from the lake. The light will shine again after over a hundred years of darkness.

The remarkable story unfolded before us! How fortunate that the county was able to secure the lighthouse. We learned that it is very rare that a privately owned lighthouse returns to the public domain. As we completed our tour, we collected literature from a table in the entryway. I found a list of items that the county was hoping to find to furnish the lighthouse. Among the items was a pump organ from the period. Mom had a pump organ collecting dust on her back porch which she had not played in years. What better place could there be for a beautiful Mason Hamlin organ? Mom remarked that the foot pedals and the cover on the accompanying stool matched the aqua carpeting in the living quarters of the lighthouse. It seemed to be a sign. The Walters volunteered that if Mom would

donate the organ, they would come to Indianapolis to get it. They gave us their names and email address. During the trip back to Indianapolis, Mom made up her mind.

Arriving home, we checked the date on the organ. 1873! Perfect for the time period of





the lighthouse. The emails flew back and forth making plans for the pickup. Mom's back porch was stacked with stuff that would have to be moved. The organ had to be cleaned, and we needed to line up help to move it into Charlie's trailer.

On the chosen day, Charlie and Hazel arrived at Mom's house at 10 a.m. having spent the night nearby. They were impressed with the organ which they had never seen, and happy that the trip on faith had been handsomely rewarded. A crew of family men including David, his son, Cody, cousin Mark and my son, Aaron lined up to carry the organ down several stairs to Charlie's waiting trailer. Two of my grandchildren, Kara and Joshua, Jill, Mom and I looked on appreciating this special occasion. As the truck and trailer pulled out of the driveway, Mom did not shed a tear. She had found the perfect spot for her lovely organ, and now it would be appreciated by many.

Yesterday Mom received a very nice letter from Emmet County thanking her for her donation. Today I received an email from Charlie informing us that her gift had caused much excitement. The committee decided to have the organ tuned. A friend of Charlie's would play for a Christmas celebration at the lighthouse.

I imagine the lighthouse in December. Deep snow muffles the sounds of bird calls. Mixed with the lap of waves and a gust of wind is the sound of silence. The view from the bluff outside the lighthouse stretches across the Strait. The Mackinaw Bridge twinkles in the dusk a short distance to the east, and to the west, a vast wilderness is silhouetted in the maroon sunset.

Inside the small lighthouse, a Christmas tree sparkles with handmade ornaments and items gathered from nature. Pine boughs and red berries deck the rooms. A crowd of locals who have always loved the lighthouse and have worked to restore its beauty has assembled to celebrate the occasion. Tall candles placed on the organ cast a soft glow on the face of the organist. The music transforms the lighthouse into a chapel on a bluff lighting the way above the great Straits of Mackinac.

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