

## McGulpin Point Lighthouse rededicated on Saturday

MACKINAW CITY – Some 1,200 people attended Saturday's gala rededication of McGulpin Point Lighthouse on the Straits of Mackinac just west of Mackinaw City.

The day's ceremonies began precisely at noon when a Coast Guard helicopter from Traverse City flew over the grounds.



After an invocation by Frank Ettawageshik, tribal chairman of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa



Indians, and a stirring performance by four Native American drummers, the light at the top of the tower was turned on by U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow and James Tamlyn, chair of the Emmet County Board of Commissioners.

It marked the first time in over 100 years that the lighthouse has protected shipping on the Straits.

Emmet County, which hosted the event, purchased the lighthouse property from a private owner last July. The county appointed a seven-member historical commission to determine the future of the lighthouse.

Dr. Bill Anderson, retired director of Michigan's Department of History, Arts and Libraries, spoke about the history of the lighthouse, first used in 1869.



The thrust of his talk, and those of the other speakers, was in part to praise Emmet County Board of Commissioners for having the foresight to preserve one of the nation's prime historical sites for posterity.



Among a host of other notables addressing Saturday's ceremonies, (which took during a brief cloudburst in an otherwise sunny day) were State Sen. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City, and State Rep. Gary McDowell, D-Rudyard. Shown here are Allen and McDowell presenting Moehl with a Legislative Resolution commending Emmet County for the purchase of McGulpin Point.



Ray Roth led the singing "The Star Spangled Banner," followed by the recitation of an original poem by Mary Stewart Adams of Harbor Springs to commemorate the occasion.



She wrote:

"We gather to dedicate our light, not to the dispelling of earth's secrets,  
But to the honor of sacred mysteries born of a place of migrating origins;  
Anishnaabek, Odawa, Mackinac, McGulpin -  
Like waves beating a story against this shore,  
breaking past the shoals of human striving,  
As wind gusting, blowing, crashing through time with anonymous intimacy,  
Urging us ever on to that place of refuge from the contradictions of history,  
Where man is more than dimly bound to the resolve to be, at last,  
his brother's keeper."

Coast Guard Capt. Mark Huebschman, commander of Sector Sault Ste. Marie, spoke of the significance of the McGulpin Point light to shipping on the Great Lakes.



Capt. Richard Moehl, president of the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association and a member of the historical commission, presided over the ceremonies. Moehl was a key figure in the purchase of, and planning for, the lighthouse. He said that for him, it was the most satisfying experience of his lifetime.

Pastor David Wallis of the Church of the Straits gave the invocation and Sister Chris Herald of St. Anthony's Catholic Church, the benediction.

Melinda Beyne-Spencley, a member of the historical commission, spoke to the media about the life of the last lighthouse keeper, her relative, James Davenport.

She said that Davenport, after serving at Waugoshance light and Little Point Sable, was transferred to McGulpin Point in September of 1879, a position he held for 27 years until the station was discontinued in 1906.

The ceremonies were followed by a Shepler Line cruise to view the western lighthouses of the Straits, including McGulpin Point.



The McGulpin Point lighthouse protected shipping on the Straits of Mackinac against storms, fog and rocks between 1869 and 1906.

Purchased last July for \$710,000 from the Peppler family, the property includes 336 feet of shoreline on the Straits with a commanding view of the Mackinac Bridge.

The lighthouse's 3 1/2 order Fresnel lens was removed after it was decommissioned. Moehl told the county board of commissioners he did not know what happened to the original lens, but he said the Fresnel lens could be replicated in acrylic for about \$50,000. While future plans may include raising enough money to have a replica Fresnel lens built by Artworks Florida, the county purchased and installed a new Tidelands Signal 300mm optic for about \$3,000 to shine a light from the tower onto the Straits. The Tidelands light was officially turned on during the May 30 rededication ceremony.

“In many ways McGulpin has the greatest potential for public accessibility and interest of any Lighthouse on the Great Lakes. We will help Emmet County achieve its goals in every possible way,” Moehl said last fall.



The Lighthouse has three bedrooms, 1 1/2 baths, a two-stall detached garage and a private guest house.

County Board chair Tamlyn, a resident of Mackinaw City, said the value of the purchase to the public was inestimable.

“The lighthouse has been closed to the public for about 100 years, and now it’s going to be reopened. It sits on the oldest piece of deeded

property in Emmet County. The 640-acre parcel was surveyed by Aaron Greeley in 1808 and deeded to Patrick McGulpin on June 1, 1811 by President James Madison.

"The first child of a McGulpin was born on the site in 1762. "The history of this piece of property truly belongs to the citizens of Emmet County.

“It has tremendous historical value. The large boulder that currently sits in the water at the base of the property was described in a letter sent back to France in 1749 as at times high and dry, at other times totally covered by water. That led the letter writer to conclude that the Straits went up and down by eight feet over periods of time."

Following judicious trimming of the surrounding trees, there are now expansive views from the tower of the Bridge, Straits the Upper Peninsula and Mackinac Island.

Tom McGrath, National Parks Service Director, Historic Preservation Training Center, Frederick, MD, visited the lighthouse with Moehl, Tamlyn and County Controller Lyn Johnson,

last summer and told them he considered the lighthouse a national treasure. He offered his assistance in restoring the tower.

According to Terry Pepper, executive director of the GLLKA, the lighthouse was built in early 1869 after the National Lighthouse Board petitioned Congress for the construction a lighthouse and fog bell at McGulpin Point, about three miles west of Fort Michilimackinac.

"During the 1850's, vessel traffic through the Straits of Mackinac was increasing rapidly, and although the Waugoshance lighthouse (several miles to the west) had been guiding mariners through the western entrance into the Straits since 1851, the absence of a navigational aid within the narrowest point of the Straits made passage during darkness and periods of low visibility somewhat difficult," Pepper wrote.

With the construction of the Old Mackinac Point light and fog signal in 1892, the Lighthouse Board determined that the McGulpin Point station would no longer serve its once critical mission, because the new light on Old Mackinac Point was visible throughout the Straits.

The keeper's dwelling and tower were constructed of Cream City brick, with the tower integrated into the northwest corner of the building. The original brick remains in near-perfect condition today.

The dwelling sat on a full cellar, which contained two general purpose areas and an oil storage room. A cast-iron spiral stairs connected the oil room to the tower.