

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MISSION ACRES



Originally published by Jack Callahan in 1997 for the enjoyment of property owners.

Edited, updated, and expanded by Joe Verdoorn in 2005 for the same purpose.

Jack expressed his thanks to all that supplied information and put up with his harassing phone calls and letters. He put considerable effort into collecting the information. There was no claim that errors did not occur in the brief history or in the history of ownership. Every effort was made to keep errors at a minimum. I thank those that provided additional information, and hid behind the same disclaimer for the expansion and update.

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The pre-historical era is important as well for it was the last glacier of ten thousand years ago that created the bay as we see it today. It was the waters left when the glacier melted that sculpted the land and left the terraces and beach lines we see as we travel up Swaney Road. The sand, gravel, and rocks brought from Canada form the backbone of the peninsula while water trapped in the ancient lake still covered Mission Acres three thousand five hundred years ago. Indians arrived about one thousand years ago and eastern settlers around 1850.

The names of the first white people to enter the Grand Traverse region are not known. According to Larry Wakefield (a local columnist for the Record-Eagle) the French-Canadian coures de bois (literally “runners of the woods”) were first. They left settlements at Quebec and Montreal and lived in the woods with the Indians as unlicensed traders and trappers. Etienne Brulé was perhaps the most famous. He was chief lieutenant of the early explorer Samuel de Champlain, who sent him into the wilderness in 1610 to learn about the Indians and the “big inland waters.” Brulé lived among the Hurons and most likely saw all the Great Lakes. The coures de bois were followed by “official” explorers like Joliet and LaSalle, who were still looking for a passage to the Indies and by the black-robed Jesuit priests who yearned to Christianize the heathen. The Reverend Peter Doherty of Old Mission and his Indian parishioners moved to Omena about 1855 leaving the land free to be divided and sold to settlers.

Traverse City

Our local destination for shopping and other essentials was not always as accessible as it is today. It wasn't that easy to get to Traverse City in the early days. For more than a decade, the tiny village was an outpost on the western frontier.

For five or six months of the year, when navigation on the Great Lakes shut down for the winter, Traverse City was almost completely cut off from the outside world. It wasn't until the 1860s that the first state road, from Northport to Newaygo, was opened. That road, now M-37, closely followed an old Indian trail.

On July 13, 1859, the Grand Traverse Herald, predecessor of the Record Eagle, printed the following instructions for travelers to reach Traverse City: Those living South and East will take a steamboat at Buffalo, Cleveland or

Detroit and come directly to Northport, which is situated on Grand Traverse Bay 10 miles from its mouth. The fare from Buffalo to Northport is about \$8 and from Detroit \$5. Those coming from the West will take passage on one of the Hannah, Lay & Co.'s or one of the Dexter & Noble's vessels leaving from Chicago. These vessel's sail regularly between that point and Traverse City during the navigation season. The fare from Chicago by sail vessel is \$5. There are small boats running regularly between Traverse City, Northport, Elk Rapids and Old Mission.

There is no land route to this place except an Indian trail, over which the mail is brought by carrier on foot, once a week. In the winter, this is our only route to the outside world. A route for a State Road has been surveyed this season, and the time is not far distant when we shall have a good thoroughfare to Grand Rapids.

The Grand Traverse Harold added, "Editors with who we exchange papers will confer a favor by copying the above."

Mission Acres Property

The history of the Mission Acres property began in 1861. On August 15, 1861, the United States Government conveyed land to George Merrill that included a portion that is now the Mission Acres subdivision. Abraham Lincoln and J. N. Granger, Recorder of the General Land Office signed the Patent Document. The land conveyed was described as "...Lots 2 and 3 of section 28..." a designation still used on plat maps for this area. Merrill Point at the north end of Mission Acres subdivision memorializes George and Eliza Merrill. They held the property only until 1863 when they sold it to Drake Tompkins. This was the beginning of scores of property transfers and mortgages indicating that use of the land for general farming was limited.

John M. and Mary Jane Franklin purchased Lots 2 and 3 on May 26, 1882. They farmed the upper and part of the lower terrace for over forty years! By tradition, their farmstead was located near the large lilac clump near the north end of Whispering Trail where the Lot 1 driveway curls around the bush. The depression behind the clump is reputed to be what is left of their "Michigan" basement. The graves of two of their children are said to be nearby. The Widow Franklin sold it on July 17, 1925 to Arthur G. and Mary J. Newton. They sold it a year later to Charles P. and Elizabeth Randall. The Randall's pink, two story stucco home is still located on the west side of Center Road somewhat south of the point where Center Road and Peninsula

Drive divide when coming out onto the Peninsula. The home still retains much of its original opulence and elegance.

On May 14, 1945, some time after Mr. Randall died; his wife sold the property to Max A. and Verna Musser and Clarence and Olive Altenburg. The Mussers took title to Lot 3 and the Altenburgs took possession of Lot 2 consisting of some arable land but mostly woods and land reverting to Forrest. Clarence was Max's uncle. The linkage to the peninsula was through Clarence's brother, George Altenburg, Dean of the Highland Park Community College. George Aultenburg was married to Helen Pratt of Old Mission.

Max Musser was a chemistry instructor at Fordson High School in Dearborn, Michigan at the time of his investment in real estate. One can wonder why he would consider leaving a secure job in Dearborn to become a small time cherry farmer on no more than ten acres of usable land for his orchard. Max and Verna restored the white farm house on the property located at the top of the first "hill" at the intersection of Swaney Road and Peninsula Drive. The orchard was planted in 1947. Max made maple syrup during his early years on the farm by boiling the sap in a rough building located at the foot of the old farm road, which connects the upper terrace with the lower terrace. A path now joins Whispering Trail with the old farm road and is used as a short cut to the mailboxes by several families. The Mussers eventually found that it was impossible to make a decent living from just Verna's local teaching job and the cherry orchard. Max returned to the classroom and taught in several Grand Traverse County schools for a number of years; tending the cherry orchard in his free time. Max was an avid amateur geologist and collected "boulders" which he placed in the farm's flower garden near the front of the house. These large and interesting rocks were originally brought down from Canada by the glaciers. A number of the more unusual rocks have since been relocated to beachside homes and cottages. The white cottage just to the West of the farmstead was built for Verna's parents who retired here after years of owning a small down state restaurant.

Clarence Altenberg was associated with Highland Park Community Collage for many years and was still so employed at the time of his purchase of Lot 2. He was a biologist and a hopeless romantic who delighted in making "nature sticks" out of broom handles for the beach children and naming groves of trees in secluded areas with names such as "Virgin's Bower." On the small piece of arable land to the North of Lot 3, Clarence planted apple trees which persisted until a new owner cleared them and Max's declining

cherry orchard and replanted the combined area to cherry trees. In a clearing in the woods North of the apple trees, Clarence built a summer residence called "Birtchwood." It was a rather modest, if not crude structure, which ultimately became a home for about twenty porcupines. The Altenbergs subsequently built a more modern cottage in the same clearing. Always a dreamer, he visualized a string of cottages on the ridgeline above the woods with the residents of these cottages having access to the beach utilizing the old farm road mentioned earlier. This led to the only known confrontation of consequence between the developers of Mission Acres subdivision and the beach residents. The issue was resolved when beach residents had large boulders placed at strategic points in the woods to prevent cars from having access to Whispering Trail. Litigation was discussed by both parties but never was undertaken. The farm exchanged hands several times since the loss of Clarence and Max. The current owner is Nyblad Farms with Peter and Jean Nyblad as frequent visitors to oversee the cherry orchard and are "friends of Mission Acres."

THE BEACH FRONT SUBDIVISION

The Mission Acres subdivision was platted on October 6, 1945. The road on the south side of the plat was dedicated to the use of the public. The sixty-foot easement on the east side of the plat was named Mission Acres Road and was dedicated to the use of the lot owners. At some point in time a petition was filed to rename Mission Acres Road as Whispering Trail and that is the official designation on area maps.

The twenty-seven frontage lots were divided between the two owner families with the Altenbergs receiving lots 1 through 14 and the Musers lots 15 to 27. The division of lots conformed to the division between the two larger parcels: Lots 1 and 2 in the original purchase from Elizabeth Randall. The respective owners of these lots undertook the sale of the lots. Clarence sought out prospects in the Highland Park Community College group and Max did likewise within his collegial group in Dearborn. Purchasers aided the sellers by suggesting to friends and relatives that they join the trek to the Old Mission area. In total, sixteen lots were originally purchased by associates or on the basis of these connections. Other associated families bought later as lots and cottages became available. With the maturity of the subdivision; business entrepreneurs, engineers, lawyers, bankers, doctors, and other non-academics have purchased lots adding to the welcome diversity of the Mission Acres community.

The deeds to these lots came with certain restrictions that reflected the tenor of the times and the desire by Clarence and Max to maintain the quality standards that they visualized for the subdivision. As examples: No residence could be built for less than \$1,500.00 and only one residence per lot was permitted. No outdoor privies were allowed and chemical toilets were to be permitted only until the arrival of electrical power. No poultry could be maintained nor could intoxicating liquors be either manufactured on or sold from the deeded lots. Of some embarrassment at the time was the restriction that "...this [deeded] property shall never be occupied by any persons other than Gentiles of the Caucasian race (servants excepted)..." and this restriction was to be applied to the end of time as well. This provision was erroneously attached to Clarence and Max, but was in fact a carry over from a restriction placed on the deed by Elizabeth Randall when she sold the property to Clarence and Max. This provision was clearly illegal in future years and one that was generally ignored from the beginning by subdivision lot owners.

To protect the health and general welfare of the community, the Mission Acres Property Owner's Association (later renamed: Mission Acres Association) was formed in 1948. Maintaining and improving the dedicated road was and has been a major activity. The Association was able to obtain electrical power in 1952 and telephone service somewhat later. The association arranged for both services to be moved underground in the early 1970's. The special assessment of around \$125.00 to get the utilities moved underground was a sore point for several lot owners and at least one refused to pay the special assessment. In earlier years garbage pick-up and ice deliveries were contracted with a local farmer.

The first cottages were, of course, constructed without the use of power tools and were usually of a size between five hundred and seven hundred fifty square feet. The outside walls of most of these cottages were constructed of half-faced white cedar logs placed vertically on the walls and joined together with wood "splines." William E. "Bill" Dennison, who built the first of four cottages constructed in the subdivision in 1947, was the construction engineer on eight of these cottages. Bill was also involved in the construction of two conventional-type homes on the beach. Bill remained "on call" for cottage owner's various building emergencies and repair needs until failing health forced him to retire from the task.

Bill Dennison assumed the role of Secretary and Treasurer for the Association in it's early years and held that office officially or unofficially for more than thirty years. As a Township Supervisor and later Executive

Secretary of the Michigan Association of County Officials he was instrumental in keeping the access to the subdivision in tip-top shape. His friendship with Bill Carroll, Peninsula Township Supervisor for many years, assured that Swaney Road and Peninsula Drive got more than their fair share of attention from the county road commission during the summer months.

Times are changing as they have in the past. The last of the original lot owners that still remained an owner and resident, Bill Dennison, passed away at age ninety-three in 1998. Second and third generations of the original owners are now owners themselves testifying to the continuing allure of magnificent Grand Traverse Bay and the secluded natural environment we have come to love and enjoy at Mission Acres.

HISTORICAL RECORD OF OWNERSHIP

* Indicates owner building original house on the property.

LOT	HISTORICAL RECORD
1	*Peter and Karen Ornberger – 1980 to current date K. Joe and Helen J. Verdoorn – 1969 to 1980 Bill and Tessie Dennison – 1964 to 1969
2	Ellen G. Weber – 1994 to current date Jerry and Ellen Weber – 1961 to 1994 *Clarence and Olive Altenberg – 1945 to 1961
3	Larry and Nancy Ward – 1979 to current date Bill and Irene DesAutels – 1968 to 1979 Harold and Rita Macklins – 1963 to 1967 *Clarence and Olive Altenberg – 1945 to 1963
4	Thomas and Valerie Andrews – 2005 to current date Greg and Kim Hartig – 2001 to 2005 Emily Schubach – 1979 to 2001 Conrad and Emily Schubach – 1979 to ? Ed and Jane Strickland – 1964 to 1979 *George Caleb Wright – 1957 to 1964 Kenneth Richter – 1948 to 1957
5	K. Joe and Helen J. Verdoorn – 1999 to current date Gene Dennison, Ellen Weber, Helen Verdoorn – 1998 to 1999 William E. Dennison – 1988 to 1998 *William E. and Tissie Dennison – 1946 to 1988
6	Joan Kroupa – 1991 to current date *Clair and Betty Pocklington – 1953 to 1991 W. J. Cornwell – 1946 to 1953
7	*Linda Bradrowski – 1991 to current date Clair and Betty Pocklington – 1953 to 1991 W. J. Cornwell – 1946 to 1953
8	Walter and Karen Sahijdak – 2005 to current date H. G. and Ellie Smith – 1961 to 2005 D. Robert Anderson – 1951 to 1961 *Reg and Evelyn Davies – 1947 to 1951
9	Jacqueline Frensley – 1999 to current date *Roger and Faith Skinner – 1945 to 1999

- 10 WAYFAR PROPERTY PARTNERSHIP -
 Kay Ward Morrison – 1986 to ??
 *Bill and Kay Ward – 1952 to 1986
- 11 Mike Dunn – 2002 to current date
 Peggy Simpson, Dudley and Susan Simpson – 1980 to 2002
 John and Esther Waite – 1976 to 1980
 *Erling Holman – 1948 to 1976
- 12 *Lanny and Mary Ann Leak – 1972 to current date
 Clarence and Olive Altenberg – 1945 to 1972
- ½ 13 Lanny and Mary Ann Leak – 1998 to current date
 Ed and Barbara Driese – 1984 to 1998
 Helen and Wilfor Schneider – 1962 to 1984
 James S. Lanham – 1948 to 1962
- ½ 13 Bob and Carley Murdy – 1998 to current date
 Ed and Barbara Dreise – 1984 to 1998
 Helen and Wilfor Schneider – 1962 to 1984
 James S. Lanham – 1948 to 1962
- 70' 14 Bob and Carley Murdy – 1998 to current date
 Ed and Barbara Dreise – 1984 to 1998
 Helen and Wilfor Schneider – 1962 to 1984
 James S. Lanham – 1948 to 1962
- 30" 14 Ed and Barbara Driese – 1984 to current date
 Helen and Wilfor Schneider – 1962 to 1984
 James S. Lanham – 1948 to 1962
- 15 Ed and Barbara Driese – 1985 to current date
 Nelle Driese, Ed and Barbara Driese – 1975 to 1985
 Nelle Driese – 1954 to 1985
 Kenneth and Nelle Driese – 1945 to 1954
- 16 Ed and Barbara Driese – 1985 to current date
 Nelle Driese, Ed and Barbara Driese – 1975 to 1985
 Nelle Driese – 1954 to 1985
 *Kenneth and Nelle Driese – 1945 to 1954
- 17 Steve and Debra Styers – 1997 to current date
 David and Jay Callahan – 1988 to 1997
 *Jack and Jackie Callahan – 1970 to 1988
 Wilber and Romola Kase – 1955 to 1970
 Leo F. and Bess Callahan – 1945 to 1955

- ½ 18 Steve and Debra Styers – 1997 to current date
David and Jay Callahan – 1988 to 1997
Jack and Jackie Callahan – 1970 to 1988
Wilber and Romola Kase – 1955 to 1970
Leo F. and Bess Callahan – 1945 to 1955
- ½ 18 *Ray and Micki Weigel - 1998 to current date
Genie Fisher – 1994 to 1998
Edward and Marion Fisher – 1960 to 1994
Leslie and Ellen Whale – 1947 to 1960
Marion Dockstader – 1946 to 1947
- 19 Ray and Micki Weigel - 1998 to current date
Genie Fisher – 1994 to 1998
Edward and Marion Fisher – 1960 to 1994
*Leslie and Ellen Whale – 1947 to 1960
Marion Dockstader – 1946 to 1947
- 20 Ray and Micki Weigel - 1998 to current date
Genie Fisher – 1994 to 1998
Edward and Marion Fisher – 1960 to 1994
Leslie and Ellen Whale – 1947 to 1960
Marion Dockstader – 1946 to 1947
- 21 *Taffy Farrand – 1972 to current date
William and Taffy Farrand – 1972
William H. Strickler – 1954 to 1972
Cassie Gibson – 1946 to 1954
- 22 Mike and Marian Straub - ? to current date
Bob and Jane Straub – 1992 to ?
Robert and Beverly Straub – 1976 to 1992
*Evelyn Straub – 1946 to 1976
- 23 Pat and Carol Conway – 1988 to current date
Bess Callahan, Jack and Jackie Callahan – 1959 to 1988
Leo & Bess Callahan, Jack & Jackie Callahan – 1950 to 1959
Jack and Jackie Callahan – 1949 to 1950
*Jack Callahan – 1946 to 1949
- 24 Susan Huntzicker – 200? to current date
Eileen Huntzicker – 1977 to 200?
Helen Snider – 1973 to 1977
*Edward and Natalie Walker – 1948 to 1973
- 25 Susan Huntzicker – 200? to current date
Eileen Huntzicker – 1977 to 200?
Helen Snider – 1973 to 1977
Edward and Natalie Walker – 1948 to 1973

- 26 Hal and Gwen Groves – 1984 to current date
 Ruth Hunsberger – 1979 to 1984
 Harold and Ruth Hunsberger – 1973 to 1979
 *Jane Holliday – 1948 to 1978
- 27 *Doris E. Wetters – 1987 to current date
 Ruth Hunsberger – 1979 to 1987
 Harold and Ruth Hunsberger – 1973 to 1979
 Harold E. and Margaret M. Perkins – 1969 to 1973
 Robert H. Chapman and Margaret Chapman – 1968 to 1969
 Robert H. and Genvieve E. Chapman – 1946 to 1968