

Fort Michilimackinac Celebrates 300 Years

There aren't many places in Michigan that can boast having a tricentennial, but Fort Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City is one of them.

French soldiers constructed Fort Michilimackinac in 1715. This small outpost, founded three centuries ago this year, grew into the great fur trade center of the Great Lakes region. Here on the shores of the Straits of Mackinac, French-Canadian fur traders and Native American trappers rendezvoused, French and British officers organized war parties and conducted intricate diplomatic councils, and explorers began their journeys into the vast western unknown.

Although French and British soldiers occupied Michilimackinac as a military post, the fort also contained a vibrant civilian community. French Canadian voyageurs, merchants, and their families called Michilimackinac home, worshipping at the Church of Ste. Anne and trading manufactured goods for furs with Native people from around the Great Lakes. After the British conquest of French Canada in 1760, British traders, including some of Michigan's first Jewish settlers, also lived and worked at Michilimackinac. Native Americans from around the Great Lakes traveled to Michilimackinac every summer, as they had done for hundreds of years, to fish, trade with one another, and hold diplomatic talks with the French and British. These three groups worked together as part of the Great Lakes fur trade, a multi-million dollar global industry which incorporated Michilimackinac as a vital logistical center and transshipment point.

Despite generally good cross-cultural relations, Michilimackinac was also the site of one of the best-known incidents of the Anglo-Indian War of 1763, popularly known as Pontiac's Rebellion. Frustrated by British trade restrictions and a number of other factors, hundreds of Ojibwa warriors surprised and

captured the small British garrison of Michilimackinac on June 2, 1763. When the British returned a year later, they worked carefully to rebuild their relationships with the Native people of the Great Lakes, who in time became valuable trading partners and military allies.

Due to Michilimackinac's prosperity and critical role in the regional fur trade, the British were anxious to protect the fort and community from American rebels during the Revolutionary War. Beginning in 1779, British troops disassembled the fort and moved it to nearby Mackinac Island. Soldiers burned whatever could not be moved to the island, where they built Fort Mackinac using materials and whole buildings transported from the old fort at Michilimackinac. The civilian community also moved, creating the downtown area that visitors to Mackinac Island still stroll through today.

Although abandoned and covered by blowing sand, the site of the old fort at Michilimackinac was not forgotten. The Village of Mackinaw City incorporated the land into a public park, which in 1909 passed to the Mackinac Island State Park Commission and became Michilimackinac State Park, the second state park in Michigan. The park initially contained a small campground, and in 1933 the commission began reconstructing the fort's palisade wall. Professional archaeologists began working at the site in 1959, providing valuable insight into the history of Michilimackinac as well as the daily lives of the fort's inhabitants. The Michilimackinac archaeology program, which has continued every summer since 1959 and is now one of the longest ongoing excavations in North America, also provided the



information necessary to begin accurately reconstructing the fort. The reconstructed community has grown steadily, and now includes the South Southwest Rowhouse, which opened in 2013 and is the largest reconstruction to date at Michilimackinac.

Today, three centuries after the creation of this fort and fur trading depot, people still journey to Michilimackinac from hundreds of miles around. Arriving in the summer months, much like the voyageurs did hundreds of years ago, these new visitors step into a thriving historic community at Colonial Michilimackinac. To celebrate all 300 years of the fort's history, a number of special activities have been added to Colonial Michilimackinac's regular programming. Each weekend from early June to mid-August, special events focusing on specific aspects of Michilimackinac's history and community will feature interactive crafts, foodways, weapon demonstrations, archaeology, music, and more. Reenactment groups from around North America will return to Michilimackinac to drill and live as their regiments did hundreds of years ago. These weekends will allow visitors to experience history in exciting new ways, and will highlight some of the people who called Michilimackinac home as well as the events that took place here. We hope you'll join us as we celebrate all 300 years of Michilimackinac's exciting history and culture!

May 30-June 1
Celebrate 300 Years of Michilimackinac

June 6-7
Treasures from the Sand: Archaeology at Michilimackinac

June 13-14
Rendezvous at the Straits: Voyageur Culture

June 20-21
The Straits Defended: Weapons on the Frontier

June 27-28
Celebrating the Church of Ste. Anne

July 4-5
Native American History and Culture

July 11-12
Crafts and Trades at Michilimackinac

July 18-19
Gardens and Good Things to Eat

July 25-26
Robert Rogers of the Rangers

August 1-2
Troupes de la Marine: The French Military at Michilimackinac

August 8-9
Bienvenue a Michilimackinac: French History and Culture

August 15-16
Soldiers of the King: The British Military at Michilimackinac

Visit

mackinacparks.com/michilimackinac-300
for more information on special events and activities relating to the tricentennial.



Peace Garden Sculpture Taking Shape

The War of 1812 bicentennial continues in 2015, the final year of the 200th anniversary commemoration. A number of special programs and events since 2012 have run the gamut from walking and bicycle tours, special programs at Fort Mackinac with new uniforms and weapons, new exhibits, a full reenactment of the battle of Mackinac Island on the actual battlefield, and more. But, just as the war eventually came to an end, so too does the commemoration. With that, a peace garden symbolizing the lasting peace between the United State and Canada will be dedicated this summer to mark the final year of the commemorative activities.

Peace gardens are common along the border with Canada, lining the thousands of miles of the longest undefended peaceful border.

The sculpture, “Be Still”, that will be placed in the center of the peace garden represents the Americans, British, and Native Americans.

The commissioned sculpture was designed by Gareth Curtiss and selected from a number of submissions of different styles and material. This piece is currently being made out of clay before being cast in bronze and then transported to the island.

The stone work and initial planting of the garden was completed in the summer of 2014 by Barnwell Landscaping, and Ground Level Masonry.

A dedication ceremony for the new Mackinac Island Peace Garden located adjacent to The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum in Marquette Park will take place this summer.



Left: This closeup of the bald eagle symbolizing the United States shows individual feathers and the detailed work. Right: Sculptor Gareth Curtiss poses with the finished clay sculpture before it is cast in bronze. The statue and Mackinac Island Peace Garden will be dedicated on July 18, the same day American soldiers reclaimed control of Fort Mackinac 200 years ago.

Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Museum Models Set for Opening



After construction was completed in the early fall of 2014, work on the exhibit space in the Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Museum continued. Most noticeable is the addition of the scale models of the *Cedarville*, both as she looked afloat, and what her wreckage now looks like at the bottom of the Straits of Mackinac.

Painstakingly built outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the models provide both a visual component and a dramatic presentation of the fate of the vessel.

“For those who never had the opportunity to see the *Cedarville* in person when it was afloat, and who cannot dive the site of the wreck, these models, in addition to the other models and artifacts in the museum, do a tremendous service in helping our visitors understand just how important this incident was,” said Craig Wilson, museum historian for Mackinac State Historic Parks.

Four additional models depicting two other vessels, the *Sandusky* and *Eber Ward*, also show the floating and wrecked condition.

The Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Museum at Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse will open to the public for the season on May 4th, 2015.

The scale models of the *Cedarville* show how the vessel looked when afloat, and as it appears today as a wreck. Both models are a 1/45 scale reproduction and will be displayed in the center of the exhibit space.

OUTLOOK

Historic collections are the life blood of museums. It is through these objects that we understand, appreciate and communicate the rich history of our sites. At Mackinac State Historic Parks we have a wonderful variety of collections that provide insight into our past. This includes historic buildings, archaeological artifacts, archival materials including documents, photographs, and paper ephemera, and historic objects including furnishings, decorative arts, military items, and a wide variety of other antiquities that reflect the material culture of the Straits of Mackinac.

The acquisition of historic objects is an ongoing task for our staff. Every summer archaeologists under the direction of Dr. Lynn Evans excavate and retrieve artifacts from the soils of Colonial Michilimackinac. Deputy Director Steve Brisson and Registrar Brian Jaeschke continually look for new items to add to the collection. Sometimes, gifts appear at the doorstep or in the mail from donors who want to leave their family treasures with Mackinac State Historic Parks. The collection of new items, whether it's a sherd of pottery from a French-period deposit at Michilimackinac or a previously unseen photograph of Fort Mackinac, is one of the most thrilling parts of our work.

The past year has been an exciting period of growth for the Mackinac State Historic Parks collection. In August, Dr. Evans completed the eighth season excavating House E of the Southeast Rowhouse at Colonial Michilimackinac. Work involved excavations in the house, wall and yard areas of the site and recovered artifacts include part of a "Jesuit" ring, a Micmac pipe, a glass set from a cufflink, a variety of ceramic sherds, and a large quantity of burned corn kernels. Every artifact is another piece of a complex puzzle that helps us better understand 18th century life at Michilimackinac.

The donation of dozens of Straits of Mackinac shipwreck artifacts by Chuck and Jeri Feltner was the most significant acquisition of historic objects for 2014. This collection not only provided great historical insight, but also encouraged other donations which ultimately helped us fulfill the dream of constructing the new Straits of Mackinac Shipwreck Museum at Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse. Other donations in the past year include postcards of Grand Hotel, a Boy Scout uniform from the Mackinac Island Scout Service Camp, and a 1920's leather-bound Mackinac Island souvenir photograph album.

We also purchase items through eBay, antique dealers, auction catalogs, and other sources. Recent acquisitions include press photographs from the motion picture "This Time for Keeps," 1880's stereoviews of Robinson's Folly, Fort Mackinac, and "Leaning Rock" on Mackinac Island, souvenir ceramics, and a matchbook cover from Mackinac Island's French Outpost (you laugh, but this is the kind of rare ephemera that is nearly impossible to find.)

Some of the most significant new finds for our library and archival collection are actually copies of original pieces from other collections. Most notably in the past few months we have secured photographic copies of two portraits of Colonel George Mercer Brooke who commanded Fort Mackinac in 1832. From the United States National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland we collected copies of two previously unknown 1880's photographs of the Fort Mackinac Post Hospital, one of which provides a unique view of the back of the building. Additionally, while hunting for images for a forthcoming book entitled "The Soldiers of Mackinac," we have located and secured copies of more than a dozen previously unseen photographs of several 19th century island soldiers.

The search for new historic objects, whether it's with a trowel in an archaeological excavation or by keyboard through internet searches, is one of the most thrilling and rewarding parts of our work. More importantly, every new piece adds to our knowledge of Mackinac and allows us to more effectively share this history with our visitors.



Phil Porter
Director



Left: The portrait of Colonel George Mercer Brooke is one of two Mackinac State Historic Parks has secured photographic prints of. Right: The sword was found and purchased on eBay and recently accessioned into the collection. It belonged to Major Henry Burbeck, Fort Mackinac's first American commander in the late 1790s.

YOU CAN FIRE THE CANNON!



Now YOU can fire the first cannon volley of the day at Fort Mackinac.

For only \$50 (\$35 for Mackinac Associates Heritage level and above), you can help clean, load, prime and then FIRE the cannon. This special experience is available every morning beginning June 6th through October 11th, 2015. Must be at least 13 years of age.

Visit www.mackinacparks.com/firethecannon for more information.

Planning Ahead: 2015

May

- 4 - All Mackinac State Historic Parks sites open for the 2015 season
- 23 - 25 Michilimackinac Pageant
- 25 - Memorial Day Observance
- 30 - Michilimackinac:300 Years kick-off event

June

- 3 - Michigan Governor's Summer Residence Tours begin
- 6 - Historic Downtown Buildings Open
- 20 - G. Mennen Williams Mackinac Celebration

July

- 4 - Star-Spangled Fourth of July
- 4 - An American Picnic
- 4 - Red, White & Blue Celebration
- 18 - 200 Years of Peace, 1812 Bicentennial Peace Garden Dedication
- 25 - Vintage Baseball Game

August

- 2-3 Griffing Art Show

October

- 9 - Fort Fright
- 10 - Fort Fright
- 11 - Mackinac State Historic Parks' living history sites close for the season.

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mackinacassociates.com



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Thank you for your support of our Fall Appeal. Through your generosity Mackinac State Historic Parks will fund many park programs and events in the coming season and continue our efforts on the reconstruction of Fort Holmes and creation of the Peace Garden. This appeal raised \$61,075. Thank you!

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Photo Album: Mackinac Island Airport, ca. 1940



Established in 1934 as a simple grass landing field, the Mackinac Island Airport was slowly expanded over the next four decades. In 1936 the Park Commission authorized further tree cutting and in 1937 allocated \$400 for maintenance, provided the State Board of Aeronautics put up an equal share. By 1948 it was acknowledged that air transport was an important adjunct to summer resort travel and the commission instructed the park superintendent to familiarize himself with air traffic rules and regulations. The runway was rebuilt in 1965 and a new terminal completed four years later. Numerous updates were made over the following decades. The most extensive were the expansion of the terminal in 2009 and a \$4.6 million complete rebuilding of the runways in 2011.