



Manitou Islands Archives Newsletter

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Newsletter

Fall/Winter 2009

Awards Honor Lakeshore Personnel and Projects

Three Lakeshore recipients were honored with this year's Historic Preservation Awards.

Offered each year as part of The Grand Traverse Heritage Center's celebration of "Heritage Days," the awards competition is open to entries in five main categories - Adaptive Reuse, Restoration, Preservation, Rural Structures, and Rehabilitation. Projects involving properties more than a half-century old, and having historical, architectural, and/or cultural value and significance, were eligible for awards in these categories. Four special honors - Special Merit, Preservation Project of the Year, Community Service to Historic Preservation, and Preservationist of the Year - recognized especially noteworthy contributions to the preservation of the area's historical, architectural and cultural treasures. The ceremony was held at the Heritage Center on Traverse City's historic Sixth Street, the evening of Thursday, September 17th, 2009. A reception for guests, complete with beverages and hord o'duvres, was followed by the presentations, with TCHC Vice Chariman Steve Harold officiating. Winners received a handsome plaque, and a full-color photographic print of their project (two of which are shown here) courtesy of professional photographer Dietrich Floeter.



A group of volunteers dubbing itself "The All-Girl Drywall Team" was honored for their efforts on behalf of the Schoolhouse on South Manitou Island. Working over two summer seasons, this independent group restored the little, one-



Dietrich Floeter

room schoolhouse to its turn-of-the-century status, complete with teacher and student desks, an original bookcase, teacher and student practice blackboards, stove, the classic schoolroom pictures of Presidents Washington and Lincoln, and even an authentic 45-star United States flag. Funding for the project was provided by the Manitou Islands Memorial Society, with in-kind and logistical support of the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, special transportation services across the water and on the island by Manitou Island Transit of Leland, and original furnishings donated by the Riker family, the island's last year-around residents. The award was received by Gwen Glatz, a long-time NPS South Manitou VIP (Volunteers In Parks), who originally promoted, and ultimately coordinated the projet.



Dietrich Floeter

The award for Rehabilitation went to 16-year old Aaron Wright, a Junior at Traverse City West Senior High School and Eagle Scout member of Boys Scouts Troop 105, based at the United Methodist Church in Lake Ann. Elevation to the Eagle Scout rank involves many steps, and requires hours of work, planning, organizing and leadership. As part of his quest, Aaron, with the help of his fellow troop members, took on the project of rehabilitating a small historic stucture on the shores of North Manitou Island's Lake Manitou. The structure was originally built as a Stiles-type privy (one having removable pails or bucket receptacles instead of a pit - probably ca. 1910), serving on North Manitou's Cottage Row as a partitioned "eight-holer" ... four for the ladies on one side, and four for the men on the other. At some point during the structure's history, it was moved into the island's interior for use as a beach house at the inland lake. It eventually wound up as a small, run-down storage shack. The Scouts, under Aaron's leadership and direction, restored the structure to its original appearance, and outfitted it for use as remote storage facility for ranger and research equipment. Upon receiving the award, Aaron, in full uniform, mentioned that besides having to lug



tools, materials, and supplies 2-1/2 miles into the island's interior, each boy gave at least a pint of blood ... to the island's mosquitoes ... during the summer-long project this summer.

Kimberly Mann, formerly working in military design and engineering with the Army Corps of Engineers in Omaha and Sacramento, joined the National Park Service, coming to the Lakeshore as a Historic Architect on her first assignment, in 1991. Upon arrival, she was briefed that her job would be to oversee the project of dismantling and demolition then going on in the Lakeshore in compliance with its initial enabling legislation, which called for most of its territory to be returned to "wilderness" condition ... no evidence of man's prior presence. Abhorred at the prospect of loosing what appeared to be a variety of invaluable historic assets, she set about the business of changing the agenda. The result was a four volume set of studies prepared by professionals from the University of Wisconsin's Department of Landscape Architecture to professionally identify, inventory, and evaluate the Lakeshore's historic and cultural assets. That was soon followed by listings for several of these assets in the National Register of Historic Places, the designation of the Port Oneida Rural Historic District, and the stabilization/preservation/restoration of the Lakeshore's remaining treasures. In recognition of her invaluable contributions, Kim received this year's Preservationist of the Year award.



Gwen Glanz

Brothers Return From War in Iraq to Work on South Manitou

For brothers Spc. James Cooley and Sgt. Elijah Cooley, it was a chance to experience a change of pace – a return to visit the past lives of former island residents on South Manitou Island. Having just returned from a second tour of duty in Iraq four weeks prior, the brothers Cooley along with mother Dorothy and Eli's girlfriend Lindsey DeGroot, set off to see how much of the brush and long-standing trees that had encroached around the Keepers quarters they could remove in the few short days they were staying.



Dorothy Cooley

Under the direction of SMI Maintenance Supervisor David Chew, the four were successful in hauling out ten compacted loads of brush and debris. However keeping the stumps intact with designs of sand stabilization around the complex. For Elijah, it was enjoyable work he could sink his teeth into. "Now I know why my mom is obsessed with this place." he commented. "There's a special sense of peace present you can't quite get on the mainland." With school just around the corner, the brothers can only look to next year for another service opportunity.



Dorothy Cooley

NPS Ranger Thomas Hall, Lindsey DeGroot, Elijah Cooley, James Cooley, Ranger Intern Shaun Campillo





The Johnson – Thompson Story

With Sandra Thompson Black
and Nancy Marie Johnson

Ben, born Bernt Sakarias Jonasen on September 3, 1858, grew up on a farm in Vanse, a small rural parish sometimes known as Lista, which is now part of Norway’s Farsund municipality in the county of Vest-Agder. His people were fishermen-farmers, living at the ocean’s edge in a land where fjords reached their fingers far into a rugged landscape, creating inlets, islets and islands without number. The farm was not far from the docks at Vestbygda, and there the young farm boy was always apt to be found, learning about life and the ways of the sea from fishermen, and from the men who sailed the schooners, full-riggers and clippers in and out of that North Sea maritime village. The only safe harbor of any size in a particularly exposed stretch of Norway’s southern coast, Vestbygda was a main point of departure for Norwegians immigrating to the America. Lured by sailors’ tales and yarns, Ben ran away to sea when he was fourteen, sailing as a ship’s boy on an American *Yankee clipper*.



Vestbygda, Norway

On October 13, 1858, about a month after Ben’s birth, the girl Petrine Gesine Gabrielsen was born in the neighboring parish of Spind, an idyllic archipelago with endless islets and islands, small farms and stone fences, about fifteen miles from Vanse. Here she grew up, and here she married at nineteen, wedding Tarold Thodor Tomassen in 1878. Unhappily, her marriage did not last long. Thodor drowned barely two years later, in the winter of 1880. He was only thirty. He left her with their young son, Thomas Edward, and his unborn son Tarral Theodore, who came into the world just two-weeks after his father’s untimely death. Gesine was only twenty-three when left a widow with a two little sons; one a toddler, the other an infant. Still a widow at twenty-six, but true to her name (Gesine meaning ‘strong, adored fighter’), Gesine left her two young boys, then just three and five years old, with her mother as she boarded the steamship that would take her to America. The year was 1884.

Coincidentally – or maybe not so coincidentally – Ben also immigrated to America that same year, and assumed a new name. The Norwegian Bernt Sakarias Jonasen, became the American “Benth S. Johnson.” From that time forward, most people would call him “Ben.”

There isn’t really any evidence to suggest that Ben and Gesine sailed together, but one must wonder why a young widow with two young sons would decide to leave the comfort of home and family, and set out all alone to make a new life for herself in a strange new land. Some say she left to join her

married sister, who had already immigrated and had settled in Whitehall, Michigan. Some say that she and Ben were childhood friends, who happened to meet once again in America. Or perhaps it so happened that she sailed on Ben’s ship and a love affair blossomed during the voyage. Whatever the case, Ben and Gesine were married in the village of Whitehall, a small lumber terminal on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, a year later – on November 5, 1885.



Nancy Marie Johnson

Gesine and Ben Johnson – c1885



Whitehall was a small company town, owned by lumber baron Charles Mears. Mears was a Chicago businessman who had been smart enough to cash in on that city’s explosive growth by acquiring thousands of acres of Michigan timber, building mills along the Michigan shoreline to produce lumber, and operating a small fleet of ships to haul it across the lake to Chicago. He floated logs chopped down in the interior down the White River to his mill on White Lake. White Lake emptied into Lake Michigan through a navigable channel and therefore provided a useful port where he could load the finished product and dispatch it to his dock at Chicago.

Ben and Gesine appeared on this scene just while lumbering activity was at its peak. The 1880’s brought a wave of Scandinavians into Michigan’s lumber camps, which probably explains why Ben and Gesine landed in Whitehall. As “birds of a feather flock together,” nineteenth century immigrants were always apt to head for comfortable surroundings. They also usually needed immediate employment, and the lumber camps were a good place to find it. Wood choppers working upriver, usually young, single men, could earn five or six dollars a week, plus room and board. River drivers, the men who rode the logs downriver, made better money, but at great risk. Those who worked in the mill, usually men who were married with families, made out best of all, taking home as much as fifty dollars a month.

There wasn’t much else going on in Whitehall during the 1880’s and 1890’s, so it’s probably a safe bet that Ben was working for the Mears operation and, as a family man in his thirties, it was probably at the mill on White Lake. He was



probably making good money in Whitehall, and after twelve-years at sea as a single man, might well have had some of his own.

Gesine, meanwhile, was kept busy with their growing family. Sigval came only seven months after she and Ben were married, on June 15, 1886. Next, fifteen-months later, came Gustavia. Then, in eighteen-months, came a second son, George; and only seventeen-months after George, another daughter, Bessie. The year Gustavia was born, 1887, Ben and Gesine were able to send for her firstborn son, Thomas, then seven or eight years old.

Lumbering was a matter of indiscriminate clear cutting back in those times. The wood choppers moved across hill and vale leaving wastelands of stumps and brush as far as the eye could see. The operators, having no further use for such land, usually tried to sell it off as farmland. But land along the lakeshore was usually



Internet - Roy Dodge

Michigan "River Hogs"

not very productive as farmland, and soon gained a reputation for being of little value. Much of it was simply abandoned to the State. Lumber shipments peaked towards the end of the

1880's. Having depleted much of the region's timber, things went rapidly downhill almost immediately thereafter. Families looking for a new way to make a living at the end of the lumbering era were apt to turn to fishing or farming.

With the demise of Whitehall's lumber business, the Johnson's chose to return to their roots; farming and fishing. Leaving Whitehall to settle on South Manitou Island, Ben bought a farm from one of the island's original homesteaders, James Miller. The Ben Johnson farm, as it came to be known, was at the southeast end Lake Florence, the island's little inland lake. It was only about a mile and a half from the little villages at Burton's Warf and Sandy Point to the east, and a mile from the island's schoolhouse to the north.



NPS - "Coming Through With Rye"

Ben Johnson Farm on South Manitou Island



South Manitou Island was a busy and prosperous place. Strategically located in the Manitou Passage with a good dock and a well-protected bay, the island was an important port of commerce and refuge for down bound vessels en route to Milwaukee and Chicago, and unbound traffic headed for Detroit and Buffalo. Passing ships – from sailing vessels to steamers to propellers – numbered in the hundreds. There was always activity in the island's natural harbor, which was routinely visited by passenger boats and fish tugs and, during bad weather, by vessels of all types and sizes. By virtue of all this maritime activity, the island was well connected with all other ports on the Great Lakes, with conveniently available and direct service for passengers and freight to the booming city of Chicago, to which the island's farmers could ship as much as they could produce, and fishermen as much as they could catch.

Soon after their arrival on the island in 1890, the Johnson family sent for Gesine's second son, Theodore, who arrived from Norway towards the end of the shipping season. As the holiday season approached, the Johnson's were now a family of eight; Ben and Gesine, now both thirty-two, Gesine's two boys, Thomas eleven and Theodore nine, and the four children they'd had together, Sigval four, Gustavia three, George one and Bessie just four-months old.

About a year and a half after they'd moved to the island, in the Spring of 1892, their last child was born, a daughter they named Jessie Belle. The little girl was just fifteen months old when tragedy struck the family. Gesine lost her and Ben's sixth and last child in June of 1894. The child was, evidently, never named, and was laid to rest on the farm. A few days later, Gesine passed on. She was only thirty-five years old.

Ben Johnson was now a widower with seven children, five of them under the age of eight. But Gesine's two boys, Thomas and Theodore were now young teenagers, fifteen and thirteen respectively. Thomas had already graduated from the eighth grade, and Theodore was in his last year at the island's little one-room schoolhouse. With the help of his two big boys, Ben held the family together, while also working a successful farm. He and Gesine's boys grew close over those years. Thomas and Theodore, out of respect for the only father they'd ever known, adopted his name, and were generally known as Thomas and Theodore

Johnson until marrying and starting families of their own. They eventually prospered in their own right. While still in their teens, they became commercial fishermen,

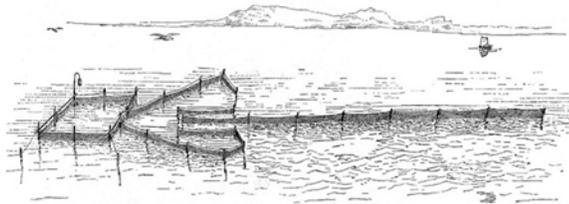


Univ of Washington - U.S. Geological Survey

Fish Camp on South Manitou - 1887



working a pound net operation near the point on the north side of the bay. Thomas had also become an accomplished fiddler, whose musical skills could always be depended upon to enhance any island event.



Internet - fehringforth.com

Pound net setup



As it turned out, the younger of the two, would be the first to marry. Theodore married his former schoolmate, Matilda Beck, in August of 1899. They were both eighteen that summer. The young couple rented a small house near the island's big dock north of the Life Saving Station, and while Theodore continued with the fishing operation, Matilda sold cigarettes, cigars, and candy to residents, and to travelers who passed through on the boats, which were frequently coming and going, with stops at South Manitou for passengers and freight.

Theo and Tillie would have four children during their ten-year marriage, Ralph in 1901, then Irene, then Floyd, and finally Clarabell early in the spring of 1910 – these last two born in a new house the couple had built, near the little village on the island's south point. Their marriage would last only until its thirteenth year. Tillie died early in June of 1912.



MIA - Rosie Warner Collection

Newly built Theodore Thompson House

Her passing was spoken of as a scandal. According to talk, she found herself with child once again and, for whatever reason, decided to end the pregnancy with a self-induced abortion. Her death resulted from *Peritonitis*, an inflammation of the tissue that lines the wall of the abdomen and covers the abdominal organs, an infection brought on as a consequence of that drastic solution. Others more charitably attributed it to

appendicitis. In the world of 1912, whether Catholic or Protestant, contraception was a vile sin, much less the unspeakable act of abortion. Martin Luther warned his followers, that the order of nature established by God in procreation should be followed, that contraception was therefore a most disgraceful crime, and those who practiced it committed an evil deed and deserved to be killed by God. It was indeed a scandalous affair; a disgrace! A highly skilled seamstress, Tillie had always sewed all her family's clothes, and was buried in one of her most lovely creations.



MIA - Rosie Warner Collection

Matilda, George & Hattie Beck



MIA Cemetery Survey

Matilda's Headstone
South Manitou Cemetery

After Tillie's death, Theodore hired a housekeeper from Frankfort, and continued with his fishing enterprise ... some say. Others tell that it was Tillie's tragic end brought Bertha Peth Hutzler back to the island. Bertha, who eventually became a South Manitou icon, had left the island in the summer of 1901 to take her seriously ill son, little Stanley Hutzler, to Chicago in a final desperate attempt to save his life. But Stanley, not quite two years old, died a few days later. He was buried in Chicago, in the Peth family plot. Back on the island, scandalous stories were being passed around, mostly among the men it is said, about Stanley's birth and death being the result of Bertha's alleged promiscuity and negligence. That talk eventually prompted Stanley's father, young John Hutzler, to file for divorce. The small island community gradually became somewhat partisan following those events, with many of the men taking Johnny's side, and the women standing behind Bertha. Tired of the stress from that sort of attention, and of feeling blamed for the contention between her friends and neighbors, Bertha eventually left the island once again, returning to her family in Chicago. Upon Tillie's tragic and untimely death, she was sent for by Theodore, and agreed to come back for a while to help with the store, and to help care for his young family. Evidently, she never again left the island.

Theodore joined the Life Saving Service on the island in 1916, but continued with the pound net fishing operation until eventually leaving the island. The pound net captured white fish and lake trout, which he packed in iced-down crates for shipment to Chicago via ships regularly visiting the South Manitou dock, receiving on average about thirty-five cents a



NPS - Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

South Manitou USLSS Crew - Theodore Thompson (far right)

pound. By way of “fish stories,” it is told that he went out to recover his catch one morning, and discovered that he’d captured a fish so big, he knew he couldn’t handle it alone. At about the same time a Navy training ship was in the harbor and, noticing some of the sailors out in their launch, he hailed them over to help bring the big fish up out of the water. A couple of the men got into Theodore’s pond boat, and it took those two plus Theodore to pull the big fish into his boat. It was lake sturgeon; not big by lake sturgeon standards, but it still weighed some 170 pounds when they got it on the scales. In order to clean the primitive-looking fish they had to fetch a block and tackle to hoist it up to the ceiling in the fish shanty. Theodore then gutted it out and cut it into several pieces, completely filling two fish boxes. When iced and shipped to Chicago, the sturgeon brought a bonus price – forty-five cents per pound!



Internet - lehringlowrb.com

Lifting the pot of the pound net

A year after Theodore and Matilda were married, Thomas married Matilda’s younger sister Hattie Beck. Thomas was twenty-one, Hattie just seventeen. After their marriage, the young couple left the island, moving down south to Grand Rapids, where Thomas had gotten work on an electric street railway system, the newly consolidated Grand Rapids Railway Company. Three years later they returned to the island after Thomas bid on, and won, the mail-carrier contract. Having acquired a power boat, which he named the “Beatrice” in honor of their first-born daughter, Thomas made regular runs to Glen

Haven during the summers, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and twice weekly, or as weather permitted, during the winter months. When the lake was safely frozen over in winter, he’d make the crossing on foot, pulling a large sled. It was the last job he would ever have.



Patty Warner - Redrawn from photos provided by Sandra Thompson Black

Thomas and Hattie (Beck) Thompson c1900

After returning to the island, Hattie gave Thomas two children, Beatrice and George. They were born on the August Beck farm, Hattie’s home place, with her mother Lizzie (Haas) Beck as her midwife. Tragedy struck the family on a Tuesday morning, June 14, 1910. USLSS Keeper Eli Pugh recorded the following entry in the South Manitou Life-Saving Station’s logbook ...

June 10, 1910: (Drowning of Thomas Thompson)

“At about 10:30 this a.m. the surfman on duty in watchtower reported that he heard screaming, and from movements of a woman on the beach two miles north of the station believed that there was something wrong there. The crew were in the surfboat at the time the alarm was given and pulled to the scene immediately.

Upon arriving learned from the woman who was on the beach that her three year old son had fallen overboard from a skiff about one hundred yards from the shore, where the water was twenty feet deep, and that her husband had jumped overboard to rescue the child and was swimming ashore with him when he sank.

At about the same time they disappeared from sight, the skiff drifted ashore. The wife took it and pulled to where she had last seen her husband and son struggling in the water. Caught the child as he rose to the surface, took him into the boat and pulled it ashore.

At about this time the station crew arrived and two of the crew immediately commenced resuscitating the child, while the rest of the crew grappled for the body of the father. After working the artificial respiration for twenty minutes, the child was restored to natural breathing.

After about forty-five minutes, the body of the father was recovered and the artificial respiration was worked for one hour and twenty minutes, when a physician arrived and pronounced life extinct and the cause of death, the bursting of a blood vessel.”



The child, George Thompson, was saved but his father died. Like his father before him, Thomas Thompson had drowned. He was only thirty-one. He left his young wife Hattie, twenty-six, and their two children; Beatrice and George, who were only five and three. Thomas was buried on South Manitou Island.

At the time of his death, the family lived in a new house that Thomas had built near the middle of the village. To help make ends meet, they shared their home with three young boarders, all three of whom were in the Life Saving Service serving at the South Manitou Station. After Thomas died, Theodore took over the mail service, eventually



MIA - Rosie Warner Collection

Hattie Thompson w/Children

buying his own boat, which he named the *Irene* after his first born daughter. In addition to mail runs, the *Irene* was used to haul farm produce – wheat, grain, and potatoes – across to the

D.H. Day dock at Glen Haven, where the goods were sent to Chicago aboard ships of the North Michigan Transportation Company, usually the *Manitou*. Meanwhile, Hattie took over the job as Postmistress, turning her home into the island’s post office. To further supplement the family income, she also cooked and cleaned for the men at the nearby Life Saving Station.



MIA Cemetery Survey

Thomas Thompson Headstone South Manitou Cemetery

One of the boarders at the Thompson house was twenty-four year old William Frank Barnhart. Hattie and Barnhart were married two and a half years later, the day after Christmas of 1912. The family left the island in 1920 when Barnhart was transferred to the Charlevoix Coast Guard Station. They lived in Charlevoix until the 1930's when Barnhart was again transferred, this time to the Grand Haven Coast Guard Station. Hattie Beck Thomson Barnhart passed away in Grand Haven on February 8, 1988. She was 104 years. Following her funeral mass at St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in Grand Haven, she was carried to Ludington, and laid to rest next to her second husband in the Pere Marquette Cemetery.

In the years that followed, Hattie’s departure from South Manitou, the Thomas Thompson home would continue as the post office, and in 1923 it also became the islands main general store. In those roles, it became a center of activity on the island. It therefore seems entirely appropriate that today, it serves as the island’s visitor center and museum, where visitors to the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore’s South Manitou Island can browse photos and artifacts of island life in times

gone by. The family’s home is preserved as part of the “Life Saving Station Historic District” on the National Register of Historic Places, listed as “HS51-1456A – the Thomas & Hattie Thompson House.”



NPS - "Coming Through With Rye"

Thomas Thompson House c1994



Theodore and his family left the island for good after his youngest children, Floyd and Clarabell passed their eighth grade examinations and graduated from the islands little school. His son Ralph had joined the Coast Guard, and Irene had gotten married. The four remaining members of the family moved to Manistee in 1922, where Theodore had been transferred by the U.S. Coast Guard, the successor to the U.S. Life Saving Service. Upon leaving the service, he went to work as a machine helper for the Manistee & North Eastern Railroad, a short privately owned system connecting Manistee to Traverse City, and serving intermediate stops. Within a year, Theodore was hired by the Ann Arbor Railroad’s Car Ferry service in Frankfort, and move up to that town. After four years with the Ann Arbor line, he was hired by the Pere Marquette Railroad’s Carferry Service, and move down to Ludington.

After several years of working for the car ferry systems, Theodore retired, moving to Manistee to spend his remaining years with his daughter Clarabell and her husband. Many years later, on February 3, 1966, Tarral Theodore Thompson passed away in Manistee. He had lived eighty-five years, during which he always spoke fondly of his in-laws, the August Beck family, and of Ben Johnson, his stepfather. Over the years, he had also remained close with his stepbrothers and stepsisters, the children of Ben and Gesine. He was remembered as quiet man, who was unfliningly kind, and always hard working.

The house that Theodore and Tillie built on the island still stands. Now known as “HS51-137 – the Theodore & Matilda Thompson House,” it is privately occupied, but is being preserved as part of the “Life Saving Station Historic District” on the National Register of Historic Places.



Gene Warner

Theodore Thompson House c2005



After Gesine’s sorrowful death in 1894, Ben Johnson continued farming for a while, with the help of his two teenage stepsons. Around the turn of the century, the government decided to establish a U.S. Lifesaving Service Station on South Manitou, and began to erect buildings and other facilities at the point on the south side of the bay. Ben had acquired property on the point, and might have been fortunate enough to have been in the right place at the right time. On the other hand, the point was a barren, sandy place, not much good for anything, so it seems more likely that he was smart enough to have foreseen the coming of the Life Saving Service, and as a speculative investment, acquired the site that he guessed would be perfect for their purposes. Able-bodied island men were employed to help with the construction work, and Ben, in his early forties, was no doubt one of them.

About the same time the new Lifesaving Station was being built, he built a house for himself on the point, and moved in by himself, leaving Thomas and the other children out on the farm. His house was a favorite place for men to gather in the evening and spin yarns, as they sat around his kitchen table. The room, filled with blue tobacco smoke, some of which came from Ben’s own corn cob pipe, also had a handy brass spittoon on the floor for those who favored Copenhagen. His coffee pot on the wood burning stove added to the aroma, with coffee brewed in the morning getting blacker by the hour. Located as it was on the boardwalk between the Life Saving Station and the village, and the Lookout Tower and the Lighthouse Station, Ben’s house, remained an ‘oft frequented place for the next half century. Today it remains as another island icon, the second structure visitors notice as they approach the island. Built approximately square, its steep peaked roof with chimney atop – a traditional Norwegian design meant to readily shed snow – renders the house rather oddly suggestive of a pyramid. Like the Thompson houses, Ben’s house has also been preserved as an item on the National Register of Historic Places – officially “HS51-122A – the Benth Johnson House.”

Ben was drafted, as it were, into the Life Saving Service in November of 1906. He was “employed” by Keeper Gus Lofton after Gus discovered one of the regular crewmembers who was



NPS – “Coming Through With Rye”

Ben Johnson House c1994

supposed to be on watch, asleep on the floor of the lookout tower. Living where he did, experienced, and able-bodied, Ben was handy for an immediate replacement. He continued to serve until the Life Saving Service was merged into the newly formed “U.S. Coast Guard” in about nine years later. For the next fifteen or more years, Ben “retired” to life as a fisherman. He’d taken over the pound nets, establishing a setup in the lake, just off the lighthouse. He ran a handsome twenty-eight foot boat he named the *Swallow*, to fish gill nets out in the lake with

young island boys hired as helpers and companions. From Ben they learned valuable lessons in seamanship, and how to secure a living from the sea. The catch was brought into his dock, at the fish shanty and ice house he’d built on the beach, just north of his house, where it was prepared for shipment to the Chicago market,



Nancy Marie Johnson

Benth S Johnson

In his seventies, he finally moved off the island. He took Alvina and his beloved *Swallow* to Frankfort, to be near his children in his declining years. The *Swallow* was eventually sold the Fredrickson brothers, who operated it out of Frankfort for several years thereafter

Ben passed away in Frankfort on Sunday, March 19, 1939. According to one report, call of the waves always sang in his heart, and while standing at the doorstep of death, he resignedly exclaimed, “I am shipwrecked on the Great Sea!”



And so ends the stories of four young Norwegian immigrants, who made a life for themselves on South Manitou, and became a significant part of the Island’s culture and history. In the words of the familiar Isaac Watts hymn ...



“Time, like an ever rolling stream, bears all its sons away. They fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.”

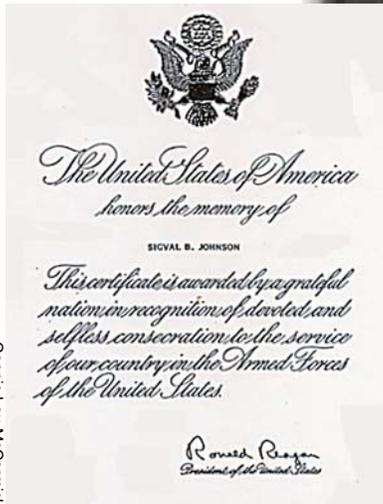
But the story of the Johnson and Thompson families does not, of course, end here. The children and grandchildren of Ben and Gesine, Theodore and Tillie, and Thomas and Hattie went on to become a part of twentieth century America – part of a people who would push on to create the most highly developed and bountifully productive republic the world had ever known.

Among them was another boy who grew up on the island, received his early education in the little schoolhouse also celebrated in these pages, joined the Life Saving



Nancy Marie Johnson

Service on the island, as island boys often did, and ultimately became an Admiral in the U.S. Coast Guard. He was Ben and Gesine’s son “Sig” – otherwise known as Rear Admiral Signal B. Johnson.



Connie Lou McCormick



Editors Note: This essay is a compilation of information from a variety of sources. Special contributions by Sandra Thompson Black, granddaughter of Theodore Thompson, and Nancy Marie Johnson, great-granddaughter of Benth S. Johnson, are acknowledged with thanks. Other sources include the publications *Coming Through With Rye* and *The South Manitou Story*, selected booklets published by The Friends of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, selected newsletters of the South Manitou Memorial Society; Internet genealogical databases, and National Park Service and other Internet web sites. While information from these sources is not always in agreement, the information contained in this work represents an earnest attempt to remain faithful to the facts, or what was probable given the times and the circumstances of the events.

The Finishing Touch ... A New Roof for the Old Schoolhouse

Last summer, when Superintendent Dusty Shultz and Assistant Superintendent Tom Ulrich came out to South Manitou for an inspection tour, Dusty noticed the healthy green growth of lichen on the schoolhouse’s cedar shingle roofing, and was heard to say, “That certainly needs a new roof!” Were it not for the roof’s steep pitch, the volunteer crew would have been more than willing to undertake that task, however neither they or Ms Shultz were willing to entertain that possibility.

Before the visitor season ended, the Lakeshore’s boat arrived with a carpenter crew of four – Scott Bigley, Louie King, Bob Saxton and Bob Bertschy – and an assortment of materials including fresh new cedar shake shingles and bright copper flashing. That came as a delightful surprise to the volunteers who had spent the better part of two summers restoring the building’s interior. Their “straw-boss,” Gwen Glatz beamed ...

“The school got it's new cedar roof with brass flashing. Wow! What a sight that is. I can't believe it! I had a special gathering (dinner) for the carpenter crew that did the school roof on their last night on SMI - and we sang "Happy Birthday" to them - but it wasn't anyone's birthday - didn't know how else to "thank" them.”



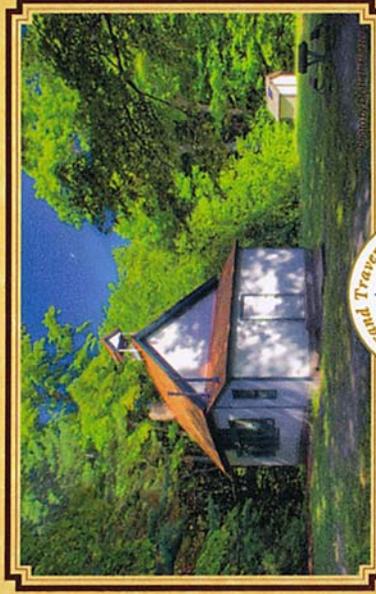
Gwen Glatz

The new roof might have been just the touch needed to assure the subsequent GTHC preservation award (see above) but, in itself, it was probably the best “Thank you” of all for Glatz and her volunteers.



Historic Preservation
2009
Award

Institutional Restoration



In recognition of the faithful and accurate restoration of a historic structure based on physical and photographic documentation

South Manitou Island School
National Park Service/Manitou Islands Memorial Society

Crew: The All Girl Drywall Team plus More
Volunteer Construction Facilitator: Anna DeCoster
Volunteer Coordinator: Gwen Glatz



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