

MACKINAC JOURNAL

Magazine of the Straits and EUP

Mackinaw Island National Park

By Rick Wiles



Michigan's first National Park

Mackinac Island National Park

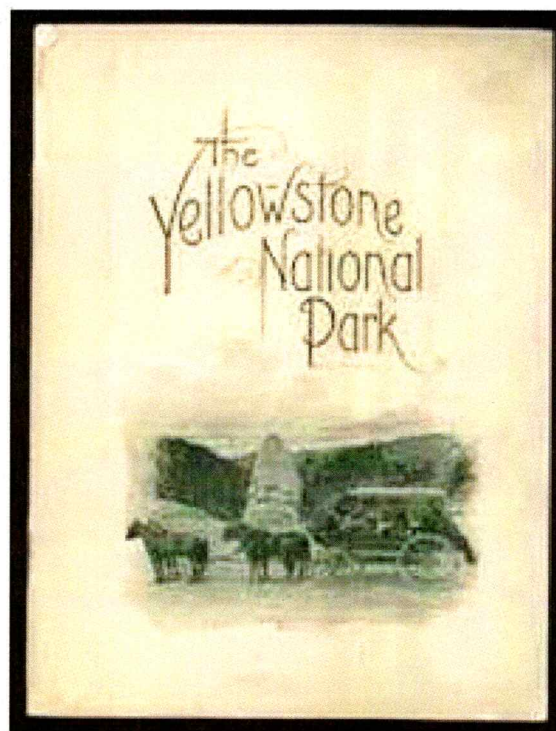
By Rick Wiles

As of May 2015, there are 58 National Parks in the United States. California has nine designated parks, and Alaska has eight. Alaska contains the three largest park areas, with one, Wrangell-Elias National Park, containing over 13,000,000 acres. The smallest National Park in Pennsylvania contains .02 acres. Twenty-seven states have at least one National Park; Michigan has only one such park, Isle Royale, established in April of 1940. However, it was not the first and only National Park within the state of Michigan.

The first National Park in Michigan was the Mackinac Island National Park, signed into law on April 15, 1875, by President Grant. The law read:

"By act of Congress, dated March 3, 1875 ... the Congress of the United States set aside certain federal lands located on the Island of Mackinac in the Straits of Mackinac within the State of Michigan, as a national park under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of War ..."





The March 3, 1875, bill made Mackinac Island National Park the second such designated protected area in the United States. The first National Park had been created three years earlier on March 1, 1872 when President Grant signed into law a bill to create the Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. Yellowstone was also the world's first National Park.

The idea behind creating a National Park was spelled out in the 1872 legislative bill passed by Congress. It stated, "*land to be dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.*" Today, most people believe that Sequoia National Park (California) was the second National Park in the United States, and the world (Yosemite was then third). The creation of Mackinac Island National Park has been forgotten. Not only was Mackinac Island this country's second National Park, it was also this country's first National Park to be delisted as such, on March 1, 1895.

Mackinac National Park lasted only 20 years. When it was established, there was no National Park System

1776.



1879.

FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION

AT THE

“NATIONAL PARK” Mackinac Island.

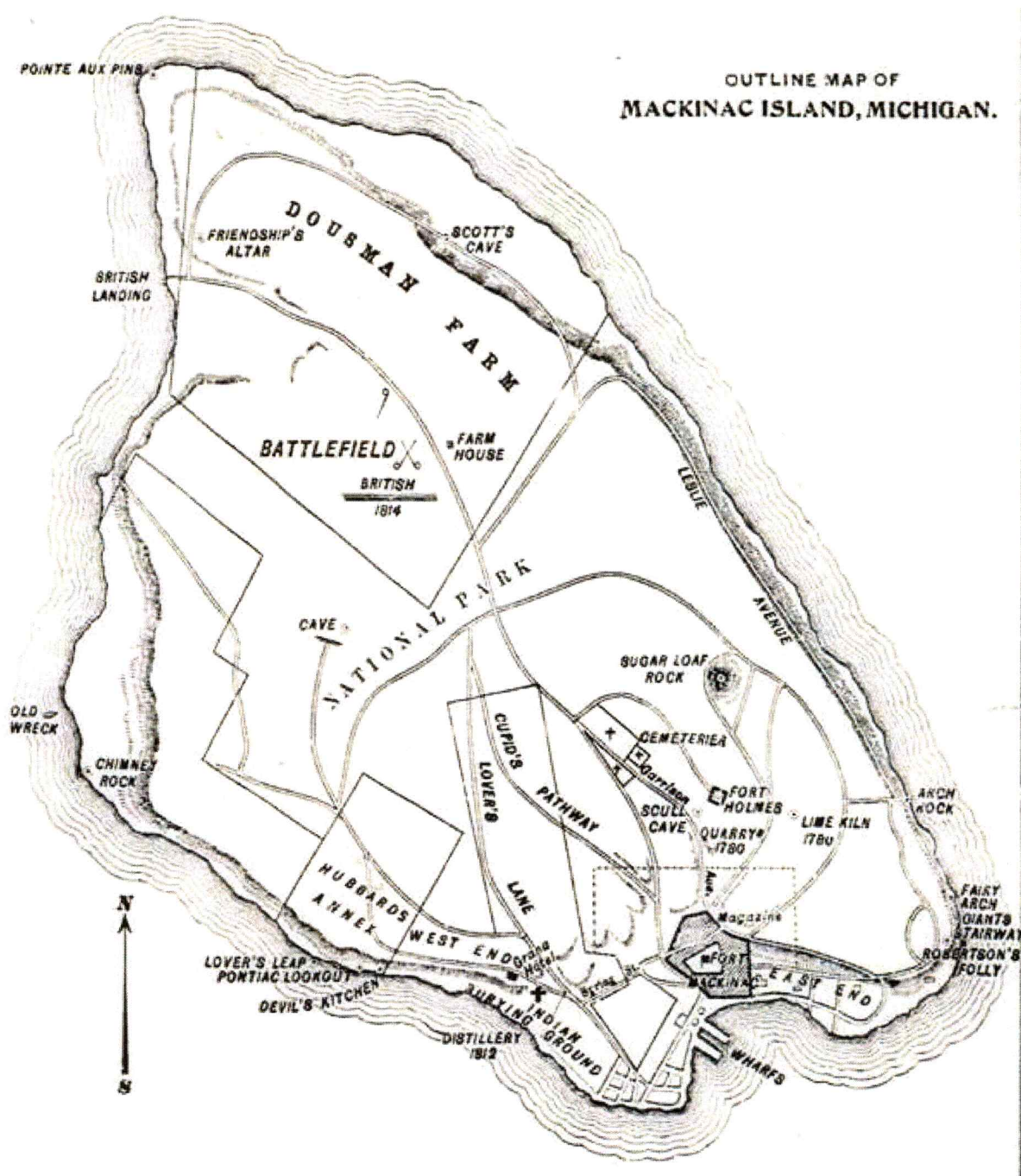
Picnic at the platform in the Park at 11 o'clock a. m. Reading of the Declaration of Independence at 12:30 p. m. after which an oration will be delivered by P. M. Packard, Esq. Dancing on the platform until 3 o'clock p. m. At 3:30 there will be a

FREE TO ALL ROWING REGATTA, ONE MILE AND RETURN.

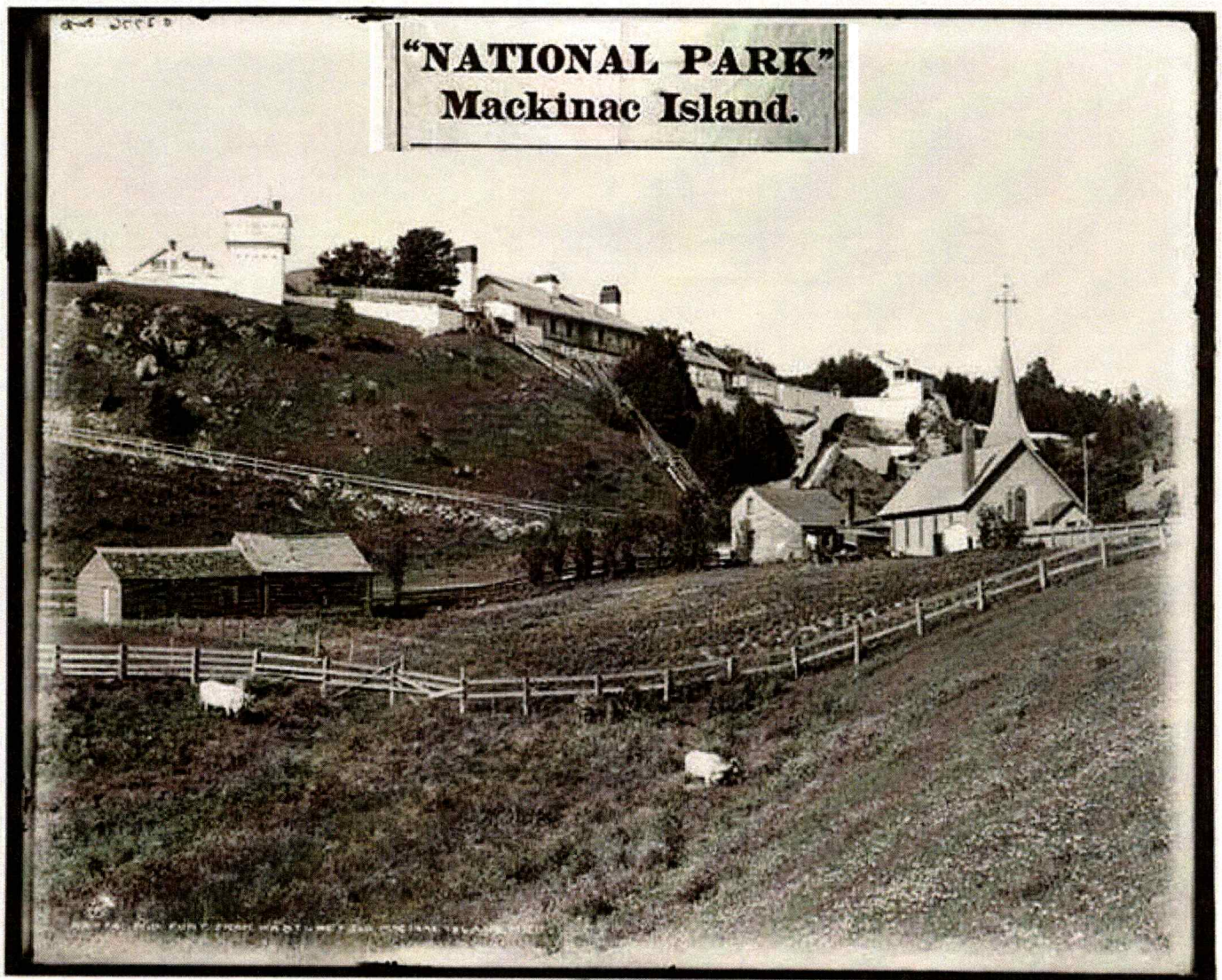
for ordinary row boats two men in a boat: 1st prize \$7, 2nd prize \$5, 3rd prize \$3. After the Regatta there will be a “Heel and Toe” walking match, distance two miles on Main street; first prize \$5, second prize 4, third prize 3, after which a “Go-as-you-Please” walking match of two miles; first prize \$5, second 3. A “Go-as-you-Please” walking match one-half mile for boys under 12 years; FIRST PRIZE three dollars, second two dollars, third one dollar. Other amusements will be arranged by the Committee on that day. Vocal music by a choir of ladies and gentlemen.

The FORT MACKINAC MILITARY BAND will furnish music during the day.

The steam Yatch “MARY” will make an excursion from Cheboygan and Point St. Ignace, and the Steamer A. VAN RAALTE will reduce the fare to ONE DOLLAR from Petoskey to Mackinac and return.



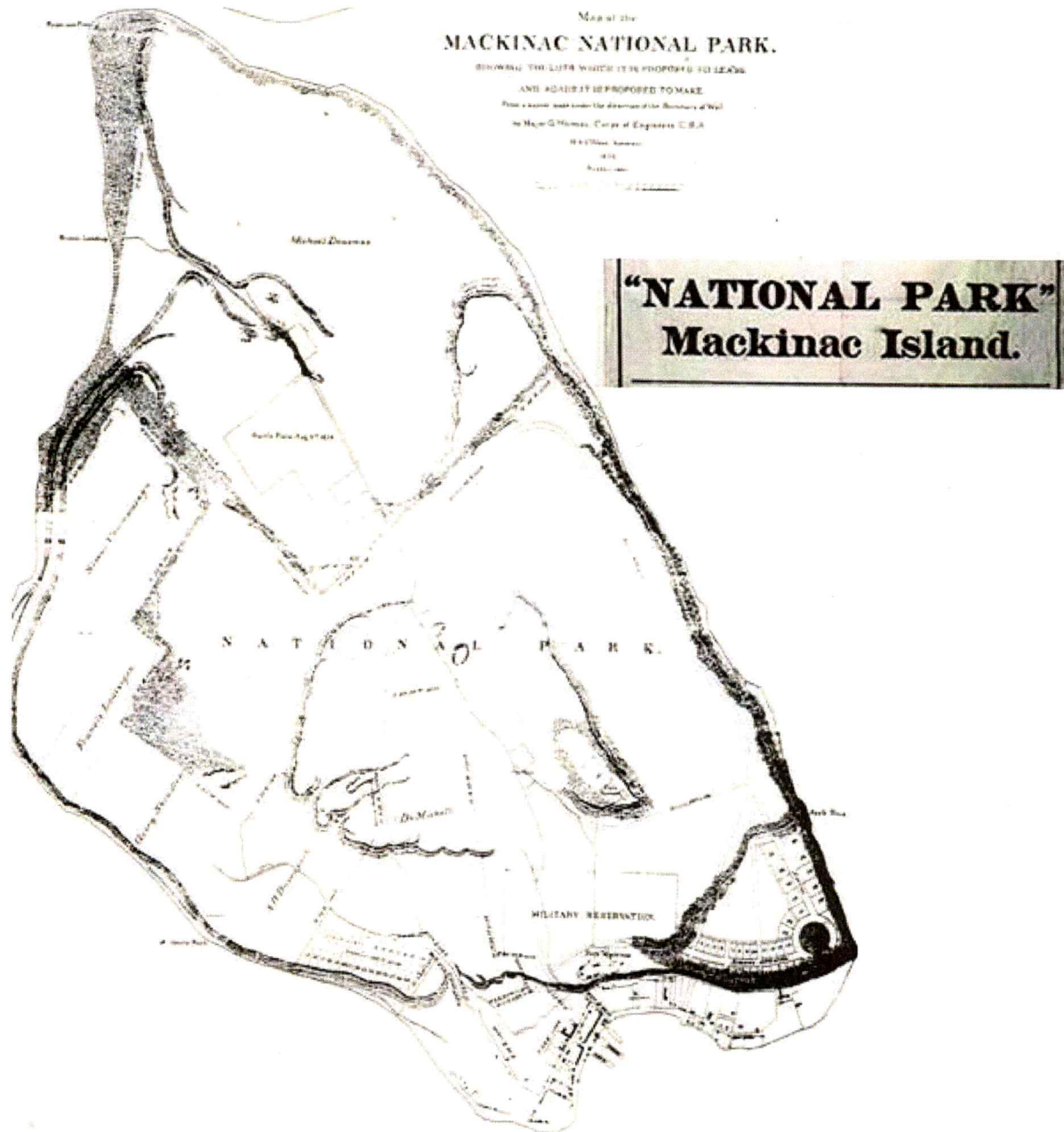
in place to administer the park. The National Park Service did not come into being until 1916. Mackinac Park was placed under the War Department's (Secretary of War) oversight. Almost half of the land on the small four square mile island was already under federal ownership due to the Army's Fort Mackinac being established there in October of 1796, when American military forces finally took over the fort from the British. Up until that time it had been known as Ft. Michilimackinac, having been moved from the southern mainland of the Straits of Mackinac to the island in 1780. In 1827, an executive order reserved certain areas around the fort for military use, plus, the General Land Office owned some parcels of land on the island.





By March of 1875 the island consisted of a Military Reservation that included Fort Mackinac. That reservation also included Bois Blanc Island to the east (reserved for its forests to provide wood to the fort's garrison, Round Island to the south reserved for a navigational lighthouse, and, after March 3, 1875, a National Park Reservation. According to author historian, and one time Fort Mackinac medical officer, John Bailey, *"All United States lands on the island not in market, were set apart as a National Park, excepting the 103.41 acres in and around Fort Mackinac."* The National Park was under the immediate control of the commanding officer of Fort Mackinac, Major Alfred Hough, who acted as the park's Superintendent.

Fort Michilmackinac, later Fort Mackinac was finished in its construction by the fall of 1783. According to John Bailey's account in his 1896 work titled, *Mackinac, Formerly Michilimackinac*. By 1857, the cedar stockade that surrounded the fort was rotted and removed. Military barracks and a hospital for two companies of men, were erected in 1858. Officer Quarters and a Commissary, along with as few other buildings, were built between 1876-1878. The entire military reservation of Fort Mackinac, was centered on the eastern side of Mackinac Island and took up almost two square miles. The other 51% of the island's property was divided between individuals, summer residences, shop keepers, and hotels.





By the 1850's the fur trading so important to the history of Mackinac Island, had given way to various commercial fishing enterprises, and the use of the island as a summer resort get-away for Midwesterners. The island was even occupied during the summer tourist-resort season, prior to the Civil War, by Black slaves in accompaniment of their southern slave-holders. From June, through early November, the island's population would grow with the arrival of Lake Steamers. Then, in 1881 the Michigan Central Railway, and again in 1882, the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railway had arrived north to Mackinaw City. That made Mackinac Island now even more accessible to tourists.

The Congressional legislative bill to create Mackinac Island National Park was, however, not without controversy. It had been first introduced on Tuesday, March 11, 1873, by Michigan Sen. Thomas W. Ferry. His reasons for such a proposal was recorded in the Congressional Record



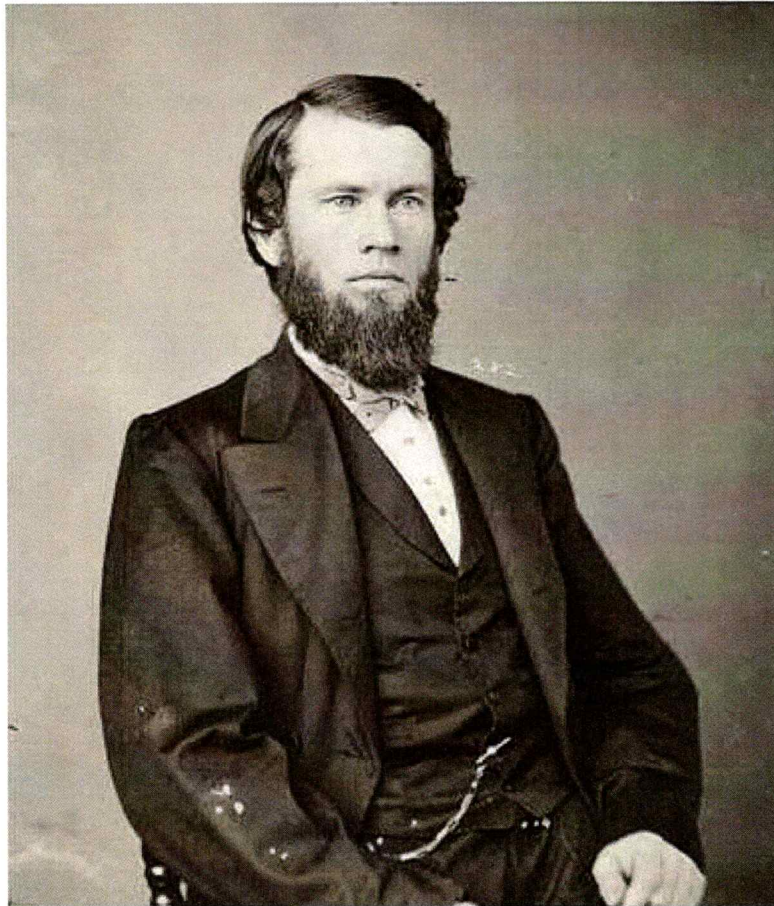
"Be it resolved that the Secretary of War be directed to ... dedicating to public use so much of the island of Mackinac ... as is now held by the United States under military reservation or otherwise (excepting the Fort Mackinac) ... to be reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale under the laws of the United States, and dedicated and set apart as a national public park, or grounds for health, comfort, and pleasure, for the benefit and enjoyment of the people ... that said public park shall be under the exclusive control of the Secretary of War, whose duty it shall be to make and publish such rules and regulations as he deem necessary and proper for the care and management of the same ... The Secretary may ... grant leases for building purposes on small parcels of ground, at such places in said park ... for the accommodation of visitors, for terms not exceeding ten years. All the revenue for such leases ... to be expended ... in the management of the park ... in construction of roads, bridges-paths therein ... He shall also provide against the wanton destruction of fish or game found within said park ..."

Ferry went on to state, "My purpose ... as the bill expresses is to set aside as a National Park, and to ded-

icate to public use ... to guard against the island's natural curiosities and beauty being lessened or destroyed by the hands of wanton despoilers ... We owe it to ourselves and to the future to grasp and fix in some form to hand down to posterity, all such points of for the public ... areas of Yosemite and Yellowstone ..."

Ferry's speech on March 3, 1873, was answered by Democratic Senator Eli Saulsbury - Delaware, (ironically the only state never to have a National Park) who stated he felt it was "an inauspicious time" financially to be entering into such a federal project. He felt the country could not afford another National Park. His sentiments were later echoed in the House of Representatives by Indianapolis Democrat, John Coburn. In April of 1874, Ferry's bill was amended to make sure that the proposed National Park grounds be always open to military use, such as drills, parades or complete military occupation in time of war, or threat of war. The Senate sent to the House of Representatives an adopted bill on May 28, 1874. After debate in House, and with only Coburn's opposition, it was jointly passed and signed by President Grant on March 3, 1875.





Senator Thomas White Ferry-Michigan

The land proposed to be converted into the park comprised 820 acres out of the total 903 acre Military Reservation lying in the center and on the north side of the Island. The Park ensured the preservation of most of the island's natural limestone formations such as Skull Cave, Arch Rock and Sugar Loaf. Overall, the General Land Office and the military owned about 1,014 acres out of the 2,221 total comprising Mackinac Island. The park land was reported to be covered with a thick growth of small pines and evergreens. Since Senator Ferry's Mackinac Island National Island Park bill contained language calling for the Fort Mackinac commander to write an implement park rules, those first rules were written by Major Alfred Hough:



Rule 1-Mackinac Park will be under the immediate control and management of the commanding officer of Fort Mackinac, who is charged with the duty of preserving order, protecting the public property therein, and enforcing these rules.

Rule 2 - All tenants renting under this Act of Congress therefor must conform to, and abide by, such rules and regulations that are prescribed for the care of the park ...

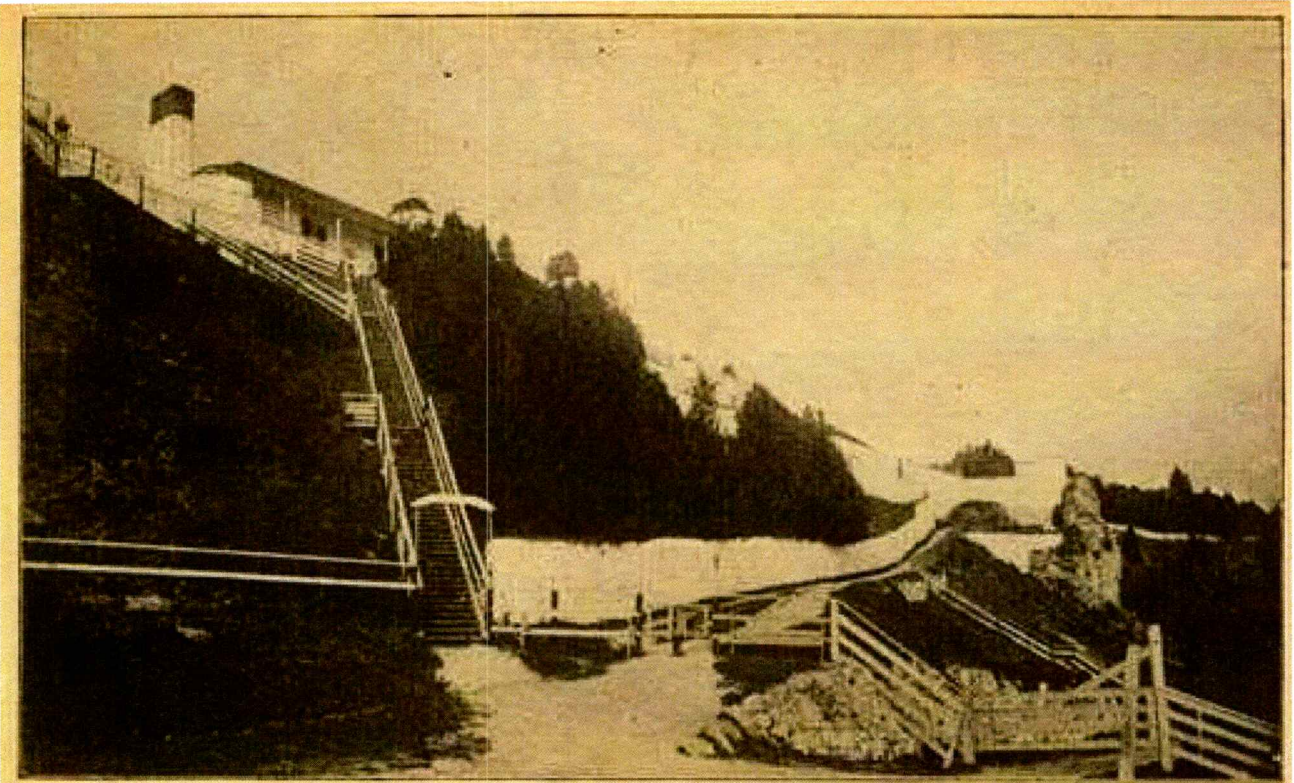
Rule 3 -The sale of wines and malt or spirituous liquors in the park, without special authority ... is prohibited.

Rule 4 - No person shall put cattle, swine, horses or other animals in the park except cows belonging to the residents of the Island of Mackinac ...

Rule 5 -Racing or riding and driving at great speed is prohibited.

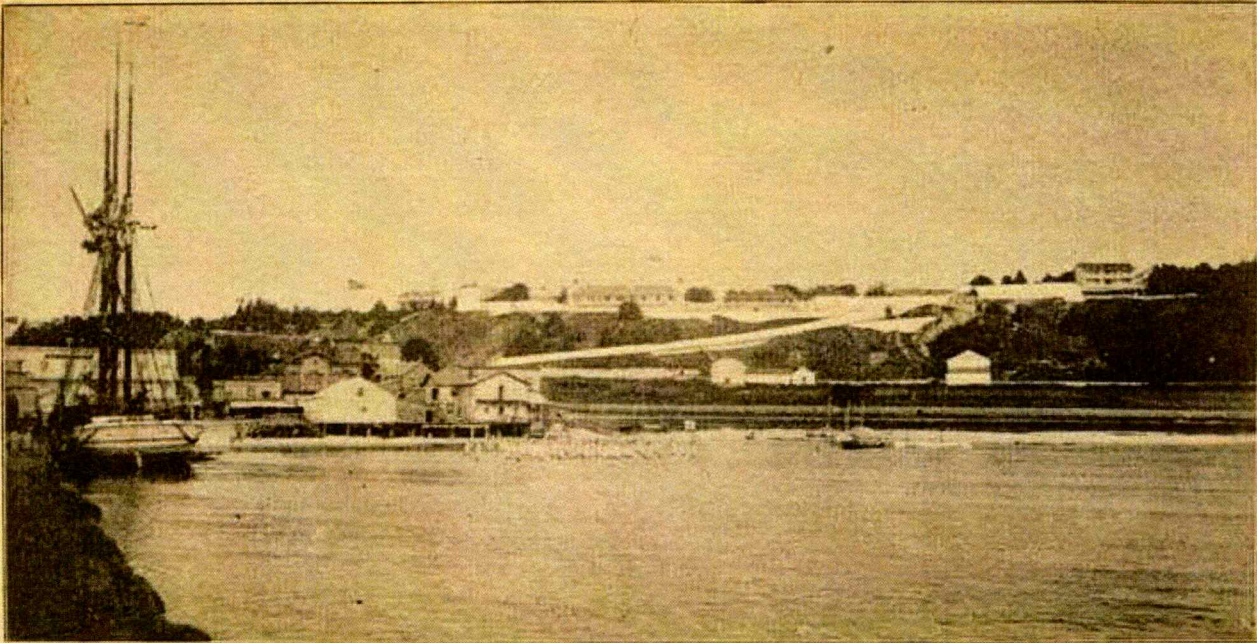
Rule 9 -No person shall carry or discharge firearms in the park.

Rule 13 -Any person who violates any of these rules



FORT MACKINAC, LOOKING EASTWARD.





FORT MACKINAC, MICHIGAN.

Fort Mackinac Michigan -1895

... shall be ejected from the park by military authority.

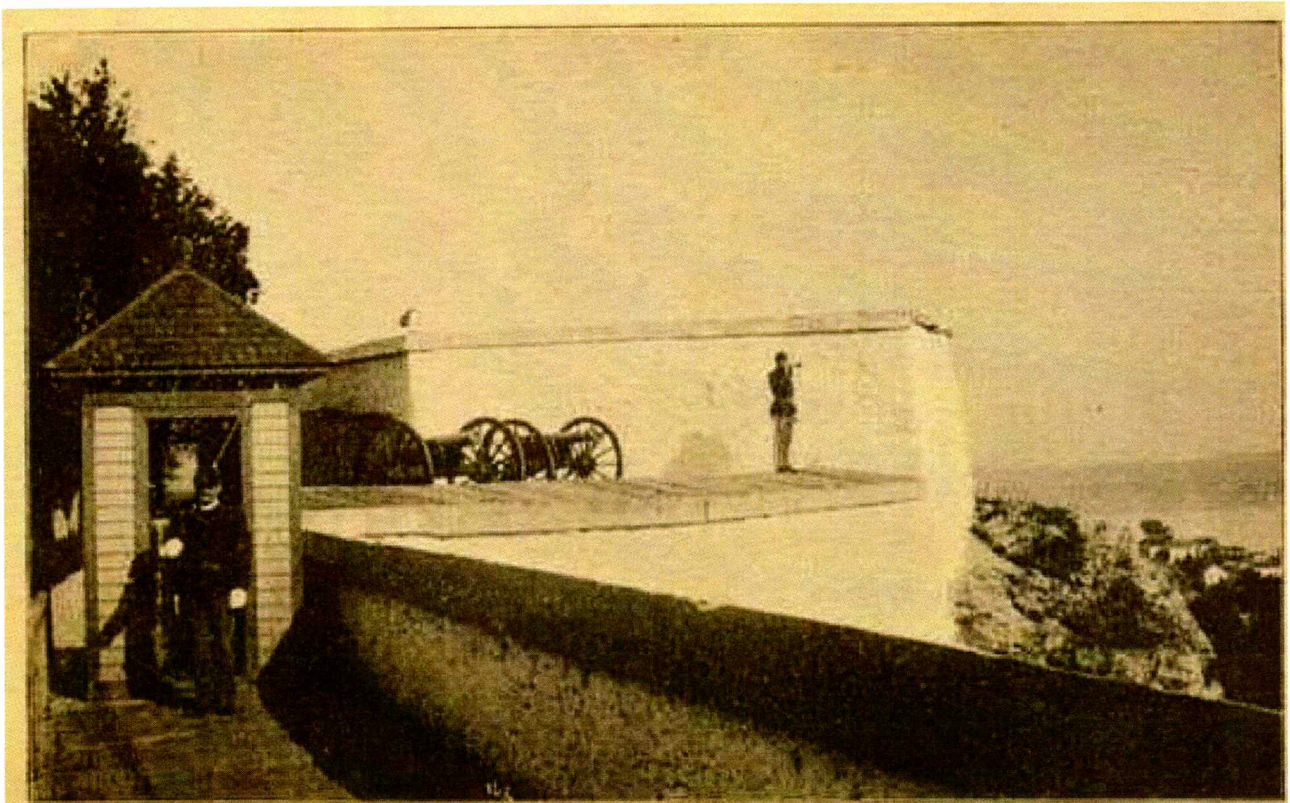
When the Mackinac National Park grounds was surveyed, certain lots were set apart for building purposes along the bluff area on the northwest side of the island, the bluff to the west of the Fort near the area referred to as Robertson's Folly, and the bluff to the east of the

Fort near Pontiac's Lookout. The Mackinac Island Summer resort Association built their first cottage on the island in 1883 on the bluff near Lover's Leap just west of the federal bluff land for lease at Pontiac's Lookout.

The leasing of National Park land on Mackinac

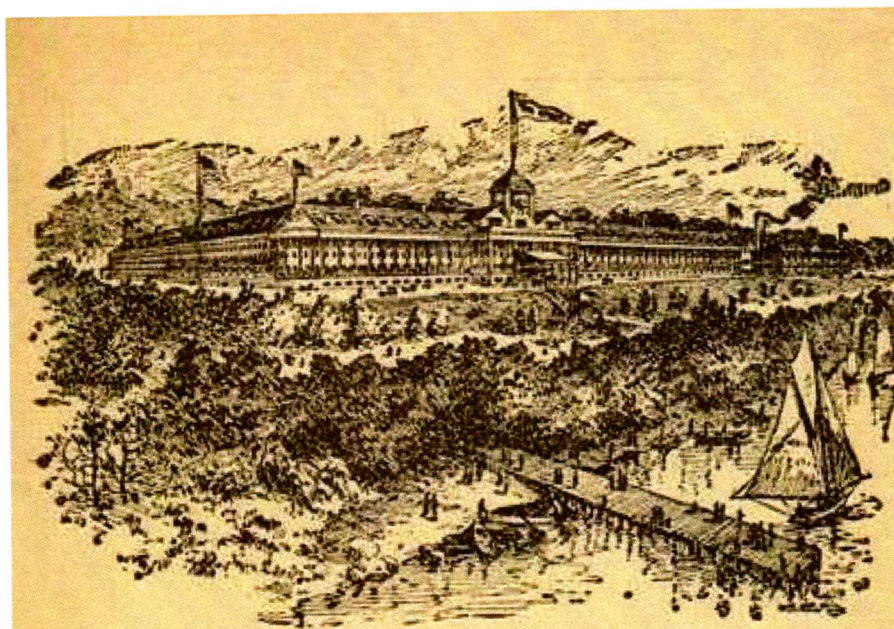
Island to individuals for the building of summer cottages was part of the compromise over passage of the March 1875 bill to create the second National Park. In response to those concerned that another park would be a drain on the federal budget, the granting of leases would help make the park self-supporting. There were 78 building sites mapped out in the first park grounds survey along what was referred to as East Bluff and West Bluff. It was almost 10 years before cottages began to appear.

It should be noted that one of the reasons for the delay in the federal building leases was the War Department's reluctance to become a supervisor of a National Park. Most members of Fort Mackinac's garrison were former Civil War veterans who did not care to be park superintendents. They also did not care for the duty of building the trails, roads and bridges called for in the Act to Create Mackinac Island National Park. It was action by President Abraham Lincoln's oldest son Robert in 1884 that really got leased park sites for building in action. He had become the Secretary of War under Presidents James Garfield and Chester Arthur. Secretary Lincoln ordered Fort Mackinac's Commander Captain George Brady to assign a trained surveyor to finish the job begun earlier in 1875.



SENTRY BOX AND PARAPET.

By 1885 there were finally three federally leased East Bluff land parcels with cottages on them. Sixteen cottages were eventually erected on the West Bluff, and 18 cottages on the East Bluff, however, by 1888, only a total of seven cottages on either bluff had been built. Just one year earlier in 1887, the island's Grand Hotel had opened. By 1893 there were a total of 14 cottages with their owners paying rent on each bluff. Newspaper articles were comparing summer resort life on Mackinac Island to that of Newport, Connecticut, and Saratoga Springs, New York. All of the mid-west's social elite were drawn to the island. However, cottage land parcel rents were only collected by the federal government for a short period of time.



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The Petoskey Daily Resorter newspaper of August 3, 1893, reported on constant rumors that, *"a big syndicate had approached the federal government about leasing part of the National Park to build a large hotel where old Fort Mackinac stood. The spot there is the best place on the island for a large hotel ... it has the best outlook and receives the coolest breezes of anywhere in the National Park."*

On October 8, 1894, the *New York Times* reported that Fort Mackinac was ordered closed by Secretary of War Daniel Lamont. His order for closure affected many military posts across the United States. The *Times* article stated, *"In some cases Army posts have been made the nucleus of fashionable resorts by persons of means."* The article that during the summer of 1894, Secretary of War Lamont had made a close inspection of many Army posts and Mackinac Island's Fort Mackinac was one of them. The paper said, *"The loudest wail will come from the summer residents of Mackinac Island who do not relish the idea of the abandonment of the post which has given prestige to their favored resort."* According to the article 35 small parcel leases had been granted to individuals, and eight of those individuals leased another parcel upon which to erect their horse stables. The annual fee for each lease was \$25 for each residence lease of land, and \$15 per year for a stable land parcel lease. The total collected for these leases in 1893 was \$1,085 with *"all of it expended on landscape work, printing, patrolling, and clerical labor."*

The New-York Times.

THE ABANDONED ARMY POSTS PROTESTS AGAINST THE RECENT ORDER OF SECRETARY LAMONT.

Residents Who Have Gathered About
the Forts Demand the Loss of Drums
Parades and Band Concerts—The
Government Has Been Expanding
Large Sum on Posts that Were
Useless from a Military Standpoint
—The Secretary of War Is Fleeing.

WASHINGTON, Oct. 2.—The order of the War Department which has resulted in a general transfer of United States troops and the abandonment of many posts in different parts of the country has brought, as might have been expected, many protests from persons whose interests have been affected by the withdrawal of the troops.

Around every military post in the United States has grown a dependency with aspirations in harmony with those of the garrison. In the majority of cases the prospect of financial gain through dealings with Uncle Sam's men in blue caused the influx of civilians to the vicinity of the post. In other cases army posts have been made the nucleus of fashionable resorts by persons of means. As Secretary Lamont's recent order included posts around which financial and social interests have revolved for years, it met with strong resistance, and not a day has passed since its issuance that letters and telegrams have not been received by the Secretary asking that it be modified so far as certain posts were concerned.

Secretary Lamont made a close inspection of many of the army posts last Summer, and the result of his investigations is largely embodied in the order which has caused such dissatisfaction in certain quarters. There is no likelihood that the order will be changed in the least particular.

The loudest wail comes from the Summer residents of Mackinac Island, who do not relish the idea of the abandonment of the post which has given prestige to their favored resort. There is an interesting story in connection with this island and the old fort.

The island of Mackinac is scarcely more than three miles long and one and one-half broad in its largest dimensions and contains approximately 2,200 acres, of which 1,200 are owned by private parties. The military reservation comprises 600 acres and the park 600 acres, making a total of 1,800 acres belonging to the United States.

The position is one of no present importance in a military sense, and is not intended to be permanently fortified. The old fort is of historical interest, however. It was first occupied by a civilized power (the French) in the first half of the eighteenth century. The French military occupation dated from 1748. The place was surrendered to the British in 1761, and to the United States in 1796. The present Fort Mackinac was built by the British in 1796. In 1812 the post, then held by a United States garrison, was surrendered to the British. In 1814 an American attack for recapture of the position was repulsed, in 1815 it was restored to the United States, and has since continued in our control, and has been continuously garrisoned.

The act of Congress approved March 3, 1875, provided that all that portion of the island owned by the United States (except 100 acres of the fort reservation proper) be "dedicated and set apart as a national public park or grounds, for health, comfort, and pleasure, for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." The second section of the same act provided that the park should be under the exclusive control of the Secretary of War, and that officer was authorized to publish rules and regulations for its care and management. The Secretary was also authorized to "grant leases of ground as shall require the erection of buildings for the accommodation of visitors, and to expend any moneys derived in the management in construction of roads and bridges within the privilege granted not to interfere with the military use of the lands in peace or war, and the Secretary not to make claim against the United States for damages by virtue of military maintenance.

It appears that under this law and the regulations authorized to be promulgated by the Secretary of War thirty-five persons have been granted leases for ten years of small plots of ground upon which to erect cottages for use as residences, and eight of the same individuals have leased other parcels upon which to erect stables, and the total area leased being about sixteen and a half acres. Each cottager is charged \$25 per annum for use of house lot, and \$10 per annum for use of stable lot. The aggregate revenue derived last year was \$1,000, and all was expended in landscape work, grading, patrolling, and clerical labor. No person has ever within the park a public house for the accommodation of visitors, nor are there any buildings for health, comfort, and pleasure, for the benefit and enjoyment of the people, except a few luxurious private residences referred to. The post commander of Fort Mackinac reports, under date of Sept. 30, that the magnificent residences in the park have each cost from \$25,000 upward. This makes an aggregate investment of approximately \$1,000,000.

It would not appear, therefore, that the intention of the law, portions of which are quoted above, have been fully realized. It is not understood to be the intention of the War Department to surrender control of the National Park and Fort Mackinac. Present orders contemplate the withdrawal of the existing garrison of one company, which costs to maintain at this post, including salaries of soldiers and officers, and the services of these troops are, while at this post, particularly lost to the military department. The true situation seems to be that the Government is expending this large sum yearly to maintain a place where are the Summer homes of some thirty-five families, and objects of interest to the Summer visitors.

The October 1894 *New York Times* article also mentioned that as of the summer of 1894 there had been no public house for accommodations built by anyone within the park's boundary, "*nor are there any buildings for the health, comfort, pleasure, benefit, and enjoyment of the people.*" According to the Ft. Mackinac Commander, most of the magnificent residences within the park from \$20,000 upward. "*That makes an aggregate investment of approximately \$1,000,000.*" The cost to maintain Fort Mackinac was said to be between \$40,000 and \$50,000 annually.

The *Times* suggested that Fort Mackinac be preserved for its historical value, the same as Fort Marion was in St. Augustine. That only the fort itself be kept and the land around it sold to private individuals who would then pay taxes to the State of Michigan. If that was not suitable to all involved, then the newspaper suggested that the lease fees be increased to "*provide funds for the proper care and preservation of the park and the public property.*" Also noted for closure in the article were military garrisons in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Oswego, New York's Fort Ontario, Forts Bowie, Fort Grant, and Fort Apache.

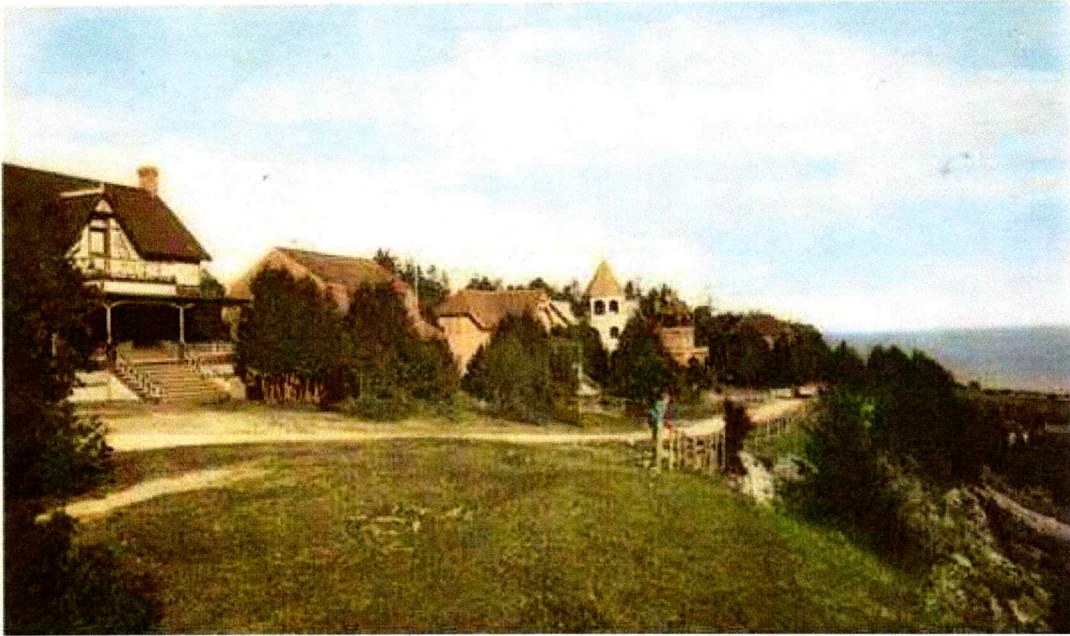
Secretary of War Lamont's actual report titled, "Report of the Secretary of War, 1894-Mackinac Reservation" stated, "*the government owns 1,207 of the approximately 2,221 acres (on Mackinac Island).*" The



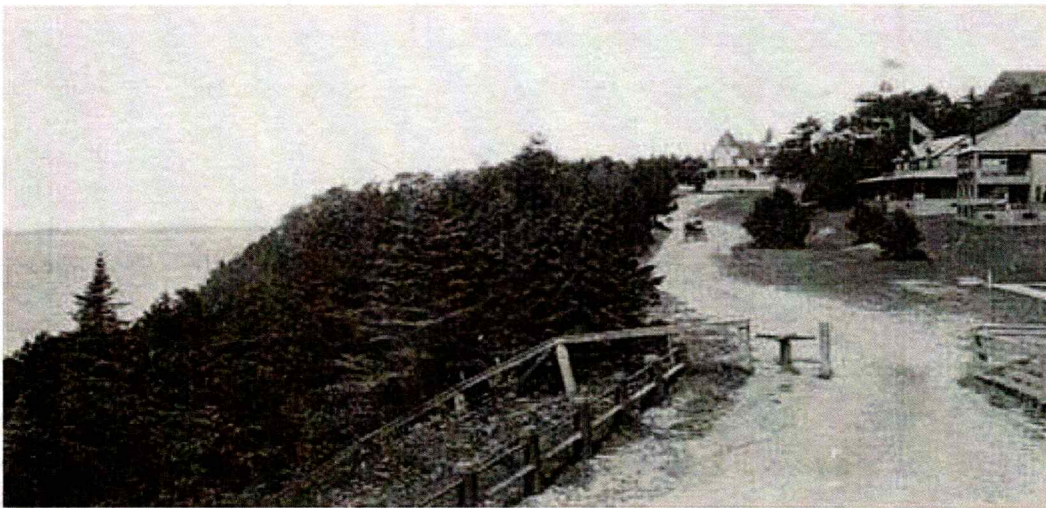
remainder is owned and occupied by individuals ... from time to time since 1875 ground has been leased at nominal sums upon which costly villas have been constructed. The reservation has never been a park for the people, and no feasible means of carrying out the purpose of Congress (in creating the National Park) have been discovered. It is practically a summer resort for the wealthy, to the maintenance of which the Government should not be bound ... It does not appear that the express purpose of this law has been fully realized ..."
December 27, 1894.

America's second National Park, Mackinac Island National Park, became, in 1895, the state of Michigan's first state park, and the first officially designated state park in the United States. The Michigan legislature created the Mackinac Island Park Commission to take over the administrative and operational aspects of the park handled for 20 years by the U.S. Army.

Our National Parks are established by an act of Congress. Over the years since 1872, when Yellowstone became our first park, there have been seven Congressional designated parks that have delisted as a National Park. The first was Mackinac Island National Park which became Mackinac Island State Park on March 2, 1895, almost 20 years to the day since it had been created. The second National Park to be delisted



West Bluff –Military Reservation



East Bluff-Military Reservation

was Sully's Hill in 1931, followed by the Abraham Lincoln National Park, and Fort McHenry in 1939, General Grant in 1940, Hawaii National Park in 1960, and finally Platt National Park in 1976.

The Michigan legislature voted to accept the gift of the National Park on Mackinac Island with passage on May 31, 1895, of Public Act 222. The act stated that the inherited military reservation and park land had to be used as a state park, and if that purpose ever ceased, the land would revert back to the United States. P.A. 222 also provided for a board of commissioners to serve without compensation, appointed by the Governor, to oversee park operations. The United States Army vacated Fort Mackinac on September 16, 1895, transferring to Fort Brady at Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. ■

Richard Wiles is a retired history and reading development instructor at Petoskey High School and a retired graduate research instructor for Spring Arbor University. His research papers are filed at the Petoskey Public Library and include: Summerset-The Robison Murder Case, Fireball in the Sky-The B-52 Crash, and The Woodland Indian National Park. Wiles holds a Bachelor's degree in history from the University of Toledo, a Master's degree in reading development-psychology from Michigan State University, and an Educational Specialist degree in community leadership from Central Michigan University. He can be reached through the Mackinac Journal.

