

Historic Wreckage Revealed

Is Minnehaha on the move?

Story and photos by Stewart A. McFerran

ARCADIA – Is that the beloved Minnehaha on the beach? High water, big waves and strong currents of the past months presumably have floated a section of the 199-foot shipwrecked schooner into the small harbor in front of Camp Arcadia. The wreck many believe is the Minnehaha is clearly visible above the waves from the Arcadia public access on Lake Michigan.

Launched on April 3, 1880 the Minnehaha's four masts were at times fitted with sail, but more often the 822-ton schooner was towed behind a steam-powered barge. As it was, on October 14, 1893, the Henry J. Johnson was heading north, towing Minnehaha, her captain and crew, and her cargo of 58,000 bushels of corn, all bound for Lake Huron. They encountered gale-force winds at Point Betsie and tried to take refuge in the Manitou Passage but were forced back toward Frankfort.

Captain Benniteau of the Johnson signaled the Minnehaha that he was turning about to seek shelter in Frankfort's harbor. After once again passing Point Betsie, with the gale at their backs, the schooner became even more unwieldy. When waves broke the hatches and water poured into the hold of the Minnehaha, the tow ropes were cut. Captain William Packer and his crew of six sent up a distress signal and headed for the nearest beach with a jib and foresail set. Captain Benniteau and the Johnson's crew could do nothing to help.

The Minnehaha on the beach north of Arcadia Harbor.



Above. The keelson of the schooner Minnehaha has recently moved into the Camp Arcadia Harbor. Right. The historic timbers of the Minnehaha are 130 years old.

The Minnehaha's deep keel hit sand offshore south of Burnham. As waves battered the hull, the sailors climbed the masts. Captain Packer realized the ship was breaking up and urged his crew to grab anything that would float and swim for shore. The masts fell as the Minnehaha broke into pieces.

Lifesaving stations at both Frankfort and Manistee were alerted. The Frankfort crew arrived first with a surfboat. They had difficulty reaching the stranded schooner because the surf was so heavy. When the Manistee lifesavers arrived at the scene, they patrolled the beach all night looking for survivors.

The six crew of the Minnehaha were lost. Captain Packer was the sole survivor. The morning after the Minnehaha ran aground, the beach was awash with wreckage but nothing at all could be seen of the ship itself. The body of the cook was found several miles south. She had a small cloth bag with a hundred dollars in bills on a string around her neck.

Lake Ann resident Ross Richardson, an expert shipwreck diver, said that wooden ships often break into three pieces: the bottom and two sides.

"Over time the ice will flatten the hull," he said.



The timbers that make up bottom of the hull are called the keelson. The keelson of the Minnehaha is newly exposed now at Arcadia. Or is it? The timbers of the shipwreck were measured in 2015 and something did not add up. As indicated on the website michiganshipwrecks.org, this evidence "suggests that it is instead a different shipwreck, perhaps the Menekaunee or the Marinette." Future confirmation awaits.

Meanwhile, Richardson drew a comparison to the wreck of the James McBride, off Sleeping Bear Dunes, to help us understand how pieces of a shipwreck might still wash ashore. He explained:

"In the bad winter of 2014 the ice had ripped the bow off that wreck, which was a quarter of a mile offshore, and put it up on shore. That's an example of the power of the natural forces out there. They can take a few tons of heavy wreckage and move it around like it's a seashell; the wave action scours underneath it. The wave action can lift and move it. It moves a couple inches a wave. Well, if it's hit by a thousand waves that can move things quite a distance."

In the aftermath of the Minnehaha wreck, farmers scooped up the corn that had washed up on the beach and fed it to their animals all winter. Mr. William Irwin salvaged timbers from the Minnehaha and built a blacksmith shop soon after the wreck. The nameboard from the Minnehaha still hangs at Camp Arcadia.

The village of Arcadia was established the same year the Minnehaha was built.

The harbor at Arcadia was opened by Henry Starke in 1893, the same year the Minnehaha sunk.

Arcadians remember the Minnehaha fondly. One recently wrote on Facebook: "Hello Minne. Thought I'd never see you again."

The third annual Minnehaha Brewhaha, a festival of beer, music and games is scheduled to take place this September in Arcadia.



Minnehaha keelson is exposed for the first time in 130 years.

Thank you to the residents of Arcadia and diver Ross Richardson. Information was obtained from the historic account of the Minnehaha in "Arcadia, 1880-1980," published by the Arcadia Centennial Committee, and on www.arcadiami.com and michiganshipwrecks.org.

Stewart Allison McFerran recently ran across wreckage on the beach at Camp Arcadia. He has sailed around Point Betsie in his sailboat "Aisling" and endured a gale off Frankfort. Contact him at samcferran@gmail.com

Environmental efforts continue as Earth Day events canceled

By Kevin Howell

In light of the COVID-19 virus that appeared in Michigan in March, a local organization has canceled its April 18 plans for Earth Day activities in Ludington. But that doesn't mean the efforts of the group, A Few Friends for the Environment of the World, will come to a halt.

AFFEW was formed 30 years ago out of concern of an increase in cancer in Mason County. Julia Chambers, co-founder of the group with Kate Love, said the intention was to educate the public through presentations on environmental issues, workshops, Earth Day celebrations and other activities.



AFFEW Co-founder and President Julia Chambers helped form the local environmental group 30 years ago out of concern for the health of the planet. Photo by Kevin Howell

“My dad and another friend of ours had cancer – so we were just sitting around talking, having coffee in the kitchen, wondering what we could do,” Chambers said.

Now retired, Chambers was a teacher in Manistee for 26 years, so the project of forming the group and educating the public, along with a love of the natural world, fell into line with her experience.

“I feel that we need a healthy environment in order to stay healthy,” Chambers explained. “I’ve always been an outdoor person.”

“We thought something was going on

(between environment and health) and we wanted to educate, wanted to work with the community and businesses and industry; we wanted to have best practices and see how we can help out the environment.”

This spring marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. According to the earthday.org website, Wisconsin Democratic Senator Gaylord Nelson, concerned about environmental destruction – oil spills, air pollution, and “rivers so polluted they literally caught fire” – called for a unified response to the crisis.

As a result, some 20 million Americans joined in protest that spring in 1970 and essentially brought about the environmental movement.

Fifty years later, add climate change to the list of environmental issues, and awareness, education and action are still needed and ongoing.

For this year’s Earth Day Celebration, Chambers said multiple activities had been scheduled.

“The keynote speakers were Henry and Lana Pollock. Henry shared a Nobel Prize with (former vice-president) Al Gore, and Lana grew up here and was a state senator and executive director of the Michigan Environmental Council, and chair of the Natural Resource Trust Fund,” Chambers explained.

Henry’s presentation would have addressed the effects of climate change on the Great Lakes Basin and record-high lake levels. Lana’s would have explored how public policies could assist shoreline communities during extreme – high or low – water level events.

Also on the agenda were presentations by Dr. Bob Breakey (vegetarian and vegan



Local Earth Day celebrations in past years have included beach cleanups, workshops and other activities to raise environmental awareness. Photos courtesy of A Few Friends for the Environment of the World.



diets) and Dr. Jack Goodnoe (green burials), as well as workshops on hoop houses, worm bins (see sidebar story) and beeswax food-storage covers.

Booths with items for sale, educational materials, a puppet show, local botanists, naturalists, and other activities were also scheduled.

Although the one-day event has been canceled, there are activities and actions individuals and families can do on Earth Day, and year-round, to learn, educate and promote a healthy environment.

“In May we have a movie on Native Plants Hometown Habitats to promote native species for the pollinators,” Chambers said.

Also in May, AFFEW will host an invasive plant eradication meet-up across from Cartier Park’s Dog Bark Park. A June 13 native plant sale is scheduled 9 a.m.-noon at Rotary Park in Ludington.

Events can be found on the AFFEW website www.affew.org.

In the meantime, celebrate Earth Day

with a walk in the woods or a shoreline stroll with a trash bag – cloth or paper is preferred, as there’s enough plastic out there already – or join forces with AFFEW or another environmental awareness group to promote recycling efforts locally. Or, join an effort like the CCL (Citizen’s Climate Lobby) or Carbon Free Manistee which works with business and government to limit carbon emissions.

Kevin Howell is a transplanted freelance writer from Indiana currently residing in Mason County. He loves the Michigan woods, lakes, people and craft beers – not necessarily in that order. Contact him at: kevin@ytci.com.

Worming our way to a greener Earth

Story and photos by Kevin Howell

Elana Warsen had planned on serving in two roles for this year’s Earth Day celebration in Ludington.

One role was to distribute information about the Manistee Chapter of Citizen’s Climate Lobby, a group she helped form early this year. The chapter works with lawmakers on federal legislation to cut carbon emissions through a carbon fee.

In her other role, she was to host a workshop related to her new endeavor.

“I’ll be launching a new business dedicated to worm composting,” Warsen said, prior to the canceled Earth Day event.

“In my dining room I have a bag of worms that’s eating my food scraps.”

Warsen explained that in the process of consuming chopped up food scraps, the worms generate waste, or worm castings, that serve as excellent fertilizer for the garden.

“It’s an odor-free process, doesn’t heat up like a compost pile outside does and it generates worm castings, which is basically worm manure and is a very



valuable soil conditioner and can replace synthetic fertilizers,” she said.

“It’s popular with organic farmers and cannabis growers appreciate it.”

Warsen puts the scraps – banana peels, tea leaves and other food leavings – in the freezer first, to make them easier to chop up and to kill any fruit fly eggs. Next, she dumps the scraps in a large bag on a stand with a sort of trap door in the bottom.

As the worms work their way through the scraps, castings are left, and the contents come out the bottom as a fine, loamy type of soil.

“When I’m ready to harvest, I open (the bottom),” she said. “I sift it because it makes it look prettier.”

“Castings can replace synthetic fertilizers,” she continued. “You add it to soil, maybe a one-to-three,

Elana Warsen, a member of Manistee Chapter of Citizen’s Climate Lobby is using worm composting to repurpose her food scraps.

one-to-four ratio; it doesn’t burn plants like fertilizer can, and it diverts food waste from landfills.

“When (a synthetic fertilizer) breaks down in landfills it produces methane, a horrible greenhouse gas.”

Warsen said castings don’t wash into waterways and pollute, as synthetic fertilizers do.

Besides producing a high-quality fertilizer/soil conditioner for her own use, her compost also provides a source of income for Warsen.

“I’m a reseller for the bags, I sell castings, and I want to sell worms,” she said. “I’m also starting to breed worms.”

Warsen recently formed her own limited liability company and is working on stepping up production at her home.

“My ultimate goal is to insulate and heat our garage and get a 4-by-8-foot industrial continuous flow through, where you crank a winch and it slices the castings, and you can get 38 gallons a week,” Warsen explained.

But for now, she said, “I’m just going to start small.”

For more about Warsen’s worm composting project, email her at: ejwarsen@gmail.com.

My First Earth Day

By Ron Schmidt

April 22 is just around the corner and I am thrilled more than ever for another Earth Day to arrive. Despite the many perils we face to save our only home, I am joyous and most grateful to have had the chance to experience the wonders of this world for the last 73 years.

It is no small thing to celebrate this day with tens of millions of others around the earth, and even though many days ahead look bleak for our earth and all living things on it, more folks every day are working to turn things around and will not give up the fight.

It is true nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something to help. This is how many of us felt 50 years ago walking into the events building (Crisler Center) in Ann Arbor, Michigan for that community’s first Earth Day gathering. In Ann Arbor, the event was called an environmental teach-in and held March 11-14, so it would not interfere with exam week.

Rachel Carson had written her book Silent Spring about the threats facing our planet. That first Earth Day get-together was an attempt to raise awareness of the harm we humans were doing and what we had to do to stop it.

There were more than 12,000 people, mostly students, who gathered for the opening rally on March 11, the day I attended. There were many environmental speakers such as Gaylord Nelson, the

“father” of Earth Day, consumer activist Ralph Nader and Michigan’s Governor William Milliken. But the one I remember most was Arthur Godfrey. He was an old guy by then, nearly 66. I had listened to him on his radio and TV shows as I was growing up. I always liked the honest and straightforward way he talked about the things important to him.

Godfrey drove to Ann Arbor’s first Earth Day in an electric car to show his commitment to improving our environment. He apologized to all of us younger men and women for his generation messing up our planet, one we now would have to clean up. There were not many back then who felt and said what he did, and I still admire him for showing up. On a side note, he also played a great ukulele on his radio show, Arthur Godfrey Time. It inspired me to learn to play the uke when I was six years old. I think I appreciated him most that day in 1970.

Little did we realize then how the struggle to clean up our planet would get harder year by year and never end. For every small success there would arise another setback.



Ron Schmidt paddles his kayak on a 60-acre wilderness lake beside his cabin in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. Photo by Mark Videan

New environmental threats would surface just as we thought we were getting a handle on the previous one. We weren’t even aware then of global warming or the billions of tons of plastic that would end up in our oceans and be eaten by fish and seafood we depend on for food and good health.

I think Earth Day is a day to get together, to renew our united determination to clean up the only home we may ever have and make it healthy again. We have to do it for all of us – human and nonhuman – lucky enough to be alive.

Here’s to Earth Day 2020.
For more about Ann Arbor’s event, go to: <https://annarborchronicle.com/2009/04/22/the-turbulent-origins-of-ann-arbors-first-earth-day>
Learn more about Earth Day at: www.nelsonearthday.net/earth-day/4-22-1970

Children’s author Ron Schmidt lives in the north woods with his leader dog, Lila. He wrote this personal account of Earth Day before the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Show-Stopping Lights

Story and photo by Brooke Edwards

I used to live in Philadelphia, where light pollution was to be expected. After living in a city with artificial light my entire life, I never realized just how bright the night was – until a chance occurrence.



Flying into Philadelphia at night shows the extent of light pollution in big cities.

For years, my bathroom had a nightlight that came on in the dark but, for some reason, I had the light unplugged one night. When I entered the bathroom after sunset, the room was illuminated when it should have been mostly dark. Since the moon had not yet risen, I knew it could not be moonlight through the skylight. The source had to be lights from other rooms in the house.

Was I ever wrong!
I shut the door behind me and stood there in amazement. I could see everything perfectly. It seemed as if the room did have some sort of faint nightlight. The culprit?

Light pollution. I had known about light pollution for years and knew it was bad here in Philly. However, until I turned off all the lights inside my house, I was unprepared for the stunning example of just how bad it was. When you live with something your whole life, it is sometimes difficult to step back and realize it is there.

Not only does light pollution hide many stars in the night sky, an issue on the minds of many astronomers, but it impacts human health as well. With all the modern technology found in our homes we seldom, if ever, give these added sources of light pollution a second thought. Researchers

have shown that light at night impacts our quality of sleep. Melatonin, the hormone that helps us rest, is suppressed by light. Have you left on a TV in your bedroom at night? If so, you probably noticed you awoke more times during the night than you do when it is not on. The same effect applies to night-time screen use ... smartphones, handhelds, laptops, etc. I know firsthand if I look at a device after waking up, I have difficulty falling back asleep.

The recent findings of some scientists suggest it is not the blue light in screens that disrupt our sleep, but the incorrect hue and intensity, (Science Daily, Dec. 16,

2019). The University of Manchester study summary states: “According to the team, using dim, cooler lights in the evening (found at twilight) and bright, warmer lights in the day (as in sunlight) may be more beneficial to our health.”

So, do yourselves a favor and turn off the television and wait until morning to check your messages and social media.

On an astronomy note, I had never seen the Milky Way until I moved to Michigan. The first time I saw it on a summer night a few years back, it almost brought tears to my eyes. There in the sky above me was a sight I had once felt was almost a myth. In fact, most people in the United States have never seen the Milky Way. Taken for granted years ago, this feature of the night sky is becoming a rare sight, due to light pollution.

A few years ago, I was flying home to Philadelphia at night. Even from many miles out, I easily could separate the cities from less populated areas. It really caught my attention, especially when approaching larger cities.

Earth Day is Wed., April 22. Turning off lights you are not using at night is a great way to celebrate. Not only does it combat light pollution, it helps save energy and human health. If you want to do even more for our world, you could replace your outdoor lights with those that do not shine upward. Unfortunately, so many outdoor lights are aimed at the sky, they create a sky glow that hides the stars.

Hopefully, one day in the future, we will be able to see the full beauty of the night sky once again.

Brooke Edwards is a NASA Solar System Ambassador. She lives in Manistee.

Liberties taken with landscapes

The disappearance of Lake Michigan dunes



Dunes once lay on this wide expanse of Manistee’s Fifth Ave. beach.



“Condo Lagoon,” a canal on the north side of the Manistee River, was the site of large dunes.

Story and photos by Stewart A. McFerran

The shoreline of Lake Michigan has been shown to be vulnerable to erosion, as high waters batter sandy banks. The sand has proven to be pliable, as shoreline communities shaped their harbors and shores. The sand of western Michigan dunes has also been counted as valuable and is still sold by the ton.

REGION – The barrier dunes at the Port of Manistee looked very different in the spring of 1933. What is now a wide-open park with pavilions along the river was once hilly. Men had not yet dug a lake in the sand, now called “Man Made Lake,” to the east of the river.

Several companies determined the sand that made up those hills could be sold and used in manufacturing. The Hubbell Sand Company owned the dune that once stood south of Fifth Avenue. Manistee Sand and Dock Company proposed building a dock on the Manistee River in 1928 that would accommodate freighters. The Sand Products Corporation started mining operations in spring of 1933.

Kathy Schaffer, of the Bear Lake Historical Society, remembers the huge dune on the north side of the Manistee River.

“We used to go down from Bear Lake every Spring,” she says. “I remember the big pile of sand, huge ... That was in the

late ‘40s.” There are now condos around an inlet to the Manistee River, where the dune had been left by glaciers and built by winds.

Author and historian Steve Harold recalls a dune that was dubbed “Creeping Joe.” It was 200 feet tall on the south side of the river. It was considered a menace, because the sand would blow off and ruin the paint on houses, and the entire dune seemed to creep toward the city. At the north end of Washington Street, dunes were in motion. The wind sent sand swirling into homes and covering gardens, as reported by the Manistee News-Advocate on Feb. 9, 1943.

The City of Manistee sold sand from the dunes for two-and-a-half cents per ton. It was sifted and loaded into railroad cars and freighters. Conveyors were installed to move the sand to docks on the Manistee River. Freighters were filled at a rate of 2,000 tons per hour. The Sand Products Corporation moved five million tons of sand in eight years. The Manistee sand was used in foundries for casting molds. It has a high proportion of iron and aluminum that made it unfit for manufacturing glass.

Man Made Lake may be viewed by the public. The Sand Products Corporation worked with the City of Manistee and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy



Man Made Lake sign.

to apply to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. If you park your car in the lake’s small lot, you can see the altered landscape of the former industrial site.

SNAPSHOTS OF WESTERN MICHIGAN DUNES

The disastrous fate of Singapore, Michigan, at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River on Lake Michigan, is well known by historians, history buffs and nearby Saugatuck citizens. In the wake of logging operations after the Great Chicago Fire that stripped trees from dunes, the town was overrun by shifting sand dunes. The sand moved due to the force of winds blowing unobstructed off the big lake. Eventually, Singapore was abandoned in the 1870s.

Sargent Sand was founded in Ludington in 1919 and has been in operation ever since. The company gifted 409 acres to Ludington State Park in 1971. After the “Sand Dunes Mining Act” was passed, the company received its first state permit to mine in 1981. The decades-long free-

for-all in the western Michigan sand box was coming to an end with environmental regulations.

Sand mining operations are currently taking place within the Ludington State Park on a Sargent inholding. In 2017, Sargent received a five-year permit to mine 12 million tons of sand on 400 acres near the shore of Lake Michigan. Lakes are now being created where dunes lay previously at the shore of Lake Michigan.

Pigeon Hill once towered 200 feet above Muskegon Lake and stood as a barrier between Lake Michigan and the Port City. It was named for the passenger pigeons that used to roost there. Oldtimers say that it protected the shoreline community from storms. This dune met the same fate as dunes in Manistee and Ludington. There is now a marina and condo development where that fine dune once stood.

In recent news, Nugent Sand is pursuing an agreement with The Muskegon Community Foundation and Land Conservancy of West Michigan. The plan includes a public park on “South Lake” and a campground on “North Lake” in Norton Shores. Both lakes are the result of Nugent’s sand mining operations that began in 1912.

The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is iconic for the dunes still there. Except for natural forces of erosion, the area seems a monument to shoreline preservation along Lake Michigan.

In all, however, the dunes of western Michigan were plundered for a century. The liberty with which sand was dug altered the landscape. Those altered landscapes are now familiar. Preserving the dunes of Lake Michigan and viewsheds in parks along the west Michigan shore is a worthy project. The result of the weighty decisions made by municipalities years ago can still be seen.

Stewart A. McFerran grew up in western Michigan roaming the dunes of Lake Michigan. Contact him at samcferran@gmail.com



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View of the Manistee harbor from Man Made Lake.