

# THE STORY BEHIND THE 'BIG ROCK'

Down the hill from the lighthouse, the Big Rock, as it is known, rests partially in the water. For centuries, it has held tremendous historical value.

It was described in a letter sent back to France in 1749 as being at times high and dry and at other times completely covered by water.

That led the letter-writer to conclude the

Straits of Mackinac rose and fell by as much as 8 feet over periods of time.

The McGulpin Point rock is approximately 33.8 feet in horizontal circumference and 37 feet in vertical circumference. It is about 9 feet tall. An estimate of its weight is 54 tons.

It is known as 'Chi-Sin' ("big rock") in the native Odawa language.

Go online for more history and event information:  
[www.emmetcounty.org/mcgulpin/](http://www.emmetcounty.org/mcgulpin/)



Step back  
into the  
past ...

## Historic site interpretation

Interpretive displays,  
commemorative coins, docents, gift shop  
and a self-guided cell phone tour keep  
McGulpin Point's history alive ...



Docents,  
gift shop  
on site

## Aid to Navigation

### GETTING HERE

McGulpin Point Lighthouse and Historic Site is located adjacent to The Headlands International Dark Sky Park, both just west of downtown Mackinaw City in Northwest Michigan.

#### FROM MACKINAW CITY

Travel west on Central Ave., then turn north on Headlands/Wilderness Park Dr.

#### FROM SOUTHERN EMMET COUNTY

Travel north on any of several main roads including M-119, Pleasantview Road, U.S. 31 or I-75.



500 Headlands Drive • Mackinaw City, MI 49701

231.436.5860

No charge  
to enter or  
to climb tower

### HOURS OPEN MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

JUNE-SEPTEMBER: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.

OCTOBER: First 2 weekends;  
check hours online

For a FREE county road map and brochures:

info@emmetcounty.org  
call 231.348.1704

# McGULPIN POINT LIGHTHOUSE



May-October, always free admission  
ON THE STRAITS OF MACKINAC  
EMMET COUNTY, MICHIGAN



# NAVIGATING *to* TODAY

*Nearly 1,000 years ago*, generations before the arrival of the French in the 1600s, the Anishnaabek nation (a combination of Odawa, Ojibway/Chippewa, and Potawatomi tribes) established villages along the Straits of Mackinac. The Odawas came to occupy the promontory now known as McGulpin Point after a hostile encounter with the established tribe, the Mus-co-desh. The Mus-co-desh, former allies of the Odawas, angered Odawa chief Sagemaw by failing to show proper respect upon his return from the western warpath. Accused of being too warlike, Sagemaw and his warriors were pelted with balls of ash and leaves as they landed. Infuriated, Sagemaw returned to his village on Manitoulin Island, gathered a war party, and set out to vanquish the Mus-co-desh. After defeat, the Mus-co-desh left the area, and the Odawas gradually spread throughout Emmet County.

## GROWING NEED FOR A LIGHT

The pre-Revolutionary War history of the Point began with the arrival of John McAlpin, who, with his Native American wife, lived on the

land in the 1760s. Post-Revolution, the land was surveyed by the new United States of America and was deeded — one of the first recorded deeds in Michigan, and the first in Emmet County — to Patrick McGulpin, son and heir of John McAlpin.

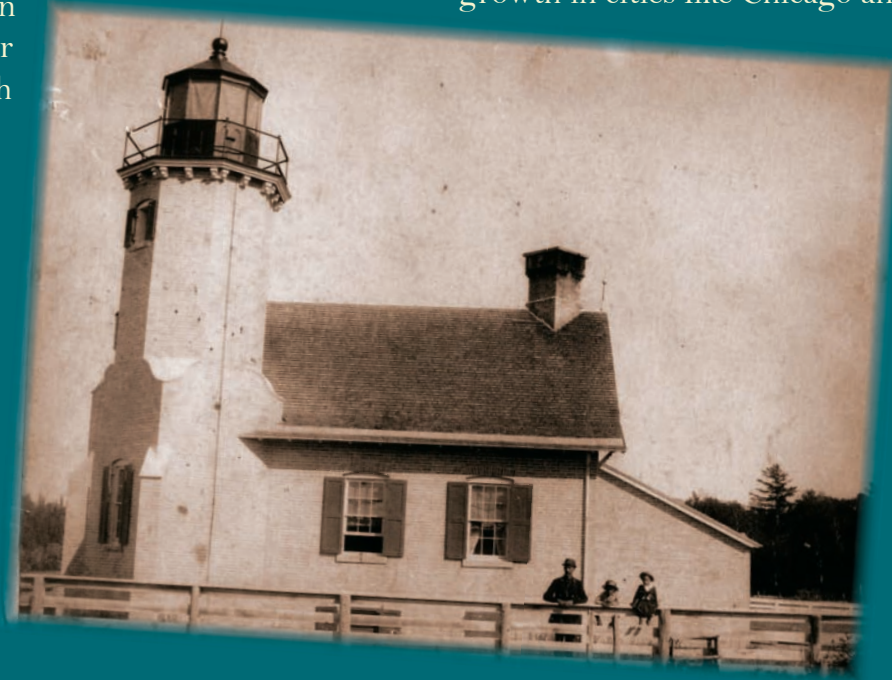
The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 spurred growth in cities like Chicago and Milwaukee,

resulting in growing vessel traffic through the Straits of Mackinac.

By the early 1850s, McGulpin Point was seen as a crucial lighthouse site. Though the Straits' eastern and western entries were covered by the

Bois Blanc and Waugoshance lights, there was no navigational aid in the shoal-ridden Straits. Congress appropriated funds for a lighthouse in 1854, construction began in 1868.

McGulpin Point was one of five on Lake Michigan and Lake Superior that were almost mirror images. In a style referred to as Norman Gothic, the structure was built with Cream City brick, made from clay found near Milwaukee and favored by the U.S. Lighthouse Board, with buttressed corners and octagonal tower.



## PRIVATE TO PUBLIC HANDS

The light at McGulpin was in service until it was rendered obsolete by the construction of the Old Mackinac Point light and fog signal station in 1892. By 1906, the McGulpin light was decommissioned and sold into private ownership in 1913. It remained in private hands until Emmet County purchased the property in 2008 to enhance recreational opportunities for all. In 2009, a gala celebration drew approximately 1,200 for the relighting of the beacon, an historically accurate replica. It marked a revival of this storied landmark with untold significance to this region.

We have the story to tell today thanks to the meticulous record-keeping of the longest serving lightkeeper at McGulpin Point, James Davenport. Davenport occupied the lighthouse during the navigation seasons of 1879-1906. During the winter months, when the Straits were impassible by ships, he would return to his home in Mackinaw City so the children could attend school. Still, he made weekly trips to the lighthouse to write reports to the district inspector in Milwaukee on the condition of the lake ice and the property.

Today, Davenport's voluminous correspondence resides in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

## KEY DATES

**Circa 1000** - The Odawa tribe settles the area now known as Emmet County after defeating the Mus-co-desh.

**Early 1600s** - First Europeans arrive.

**1671** - Founding of St. Ignace.

**1761** - Patrick McGulpin arrives in NW Mich., serving in the British military.

**1774** - John McGulpin (Patrick's father; original spelling "McAlpin") and his Native American wife inhabit area known as McGulpin Point.

**1775** - Revolutionary War starts.

**1811** - Patrick McGulpin, heir to John, receives the first recorded deed to McGulpin Property, the first Emmet County deed issued by the USA.

**1825** - Erie Canal opens.

**1850s** - Vessel traffic through the Straits of Mackinac increases dramatically and spurs the development of lighthouses.

**1854** - Congress approves plans for McGulpin Point Lighthouse.

**1861** - Civil War begins, interrupting construction of the lighthouse.

**1867** - McGulpin Point becomes property of the federal government.

**1868** - Construction begins on lighthouse.

**1869** - McGulpin light shines for first time.

**1906** - McGulpin Point is decommissioned.

**1913** - The lighthouse passes into private ownership.

**2008** - Emmet County purchases McGulpin Point from the Peppler family. It includes 330 feet of Lake Michigan shoreline.

