Take a walk
and enjoy Pure Michigan.
It’s free!

See center map and back of booklet for tour details.
St. Ignace is on a little peninsula that juts out into the Straits of Mackinac. Native settlements were located on the bays on either side of the little Peninsula: West Moran Bay (Lake Michigan) and East Moran Bay (Lake Huron).
Three Mackinac forts, occupied by French, British, Natives, and Americans.

1 UPPER PENINSULA

- *1st Fort, Fort de Buade* built in 1683 by the French in St. Ignace on East Moran Bay. Named Fort de Buade about the 1690s.

2 LOWER PENINSULA

- *2nd Fort, Fort Michilimackinac* in Mackinaw City, built about 1715 by the French. Occupied by the British in 1761 and taken by Chief Minavavana during the Pontiac Rebellion in 1763. Reoccupied by the British in 1764.

3 MACKINAC ISLAND

- *3rd Fort, Fort Mackinac* on Mackinac Island. Built in 1780-81 by the British, occupied by the Americans after the Revolution, taken by the British in the War of 1812, then reoccupied by the Americans afterward.

*Note: There were also two forts built by the native Huron and Odawa tribes in St. Ignace at the time the French first occupied the area.

**The Three Mackinacs**

At one time all of the Straits area was called Michilimackinac. Today, you find the latter part of that name on all surrounding shores. Three world powers reigned over the fur trade center here. While moving around the Straits in a strategy to protect it, they built three forts on the land points we call the “MACKINAC TRIANGLE.”

1. MACKINAC COUNTY (at St. Ignace, Upper Peninsula)
2. MACKINAW CITY (at Mackinaw City, Lower Peninsula)
3. MACKINAC ISLAND (in Lake Huron)
The St. Ignace Historic Walking Tour
Third Edition, 2010

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For Further Reading

Rendezvous at the Straits, Vol. I & II and Birch Bark Canoes, Vol. I & II
by Timothy Kent

Before the Bridge by Emerson Smith

A Tale of the Mackinac Fur Trade by Clyde R. Fort

St. Ignace by St. Ignace Public Library

Marquette Mission Site, St. Ignace, MSU Dept. of Anthropology
http://anthropology.msu.edu/marquettemission//Community_History.html

St. Ignace Public Library carries many books on local history.
To purchase locally: Ojibwa Museum, Fort de Buade Museum, and Book
World carry historic collections.

The Michilimackinac Historical Society

MHS is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve and promote
local history. We operate the Fort de Buade Museum and offer both trips
through the museum and the walking tour booklet free of charge. Donations
to help the effort to promote history are happily accepted. For more infor-
mation, stop by the Fort de Buade Museum or call (906) 643-6627 or visit
us online at http://fortdebuade.bravehost.com.
1. Mission History

The museum and grounds across the street were a Huron refugee settlement and a Jesuit Mission.

The site of the mission and Huron village are the earliest located historical settlement in the State of Michigan. Father Marquette and the Hurons landed right on this beach in birch bark canoes in 1671.

- Directly across this little bay, was a settlement of Odawa natives. Their village was on the bluff and ran down to the point.
- These two separate settlements, the Odawa and the Huron, were divided by a palisade or fence.
- There was another Odawa settlement located opposite this bay on Lake Michigan. A trail ran between the two Odawa villages. They also had a separate chapel, the St. Francis Borgia Mission. (See map Page i.)
- Fort de Buade and a French village with some 60 houses were south of this mission.

Many famous explorers and fur traders came through this central location between the lakes. As an earlier Jesuit commented, St. Ignace had “Everything possible to commend . . . fish are abundant at all seasons, and the soil is very productive. There is excellent hunting of bears, deer and wild cats . . . it is the great resort of all the nations going to or coming from the North or the South.”

A few of the earliest explorers to have passed through here were Jean Nicolet in 1634, Radisson and Groseilliers in the 1650s, and Perrot and Baudry in the 1660s.

Artist’s rendition of a 1717 map depicting East Moran Bay at St. Ignace.
2. Birch Bark Canoes

The only highways through the wilderness of old were the rivers, streams, and lakes. The canoe was the mode of transportation and the birch bark canoe was like the “Mercedes Benz” of all small watercraft. This master of all canoes was crafted by Native Americans from the bark of the white birch tree. Merely a birch bark skin, it was framed with cedar strips, sewn together, and sealed with pitch. It was just as Longfellow described it in the *Song of Hiawatha*:

“...And it floated on the river  
Like a yellow leaf in autumn  
Like a yellow water-lily.”

The Native Americans perfected a vessel that was indispensable to their life. It enabled them to penetrate regions where vast forests were almost trackless. They could navigate any of the numerous lakes or streams, carry it across land (portage), and paddle down into another river system. The craft was buoyant in only a few inches of water and so delicate it had to be boarded only when floating. Highly maneuverable, it could be turned by the twist of a paddler's wrist. It was so light one could easily carry it overhead, yet it could hold almost a ton of furs and supplies!

In the late 1600s, the Odawa village was reported to have a lucrative business manufacturing hundreds of canoes each year for fur traders. This child’s canoe was crafted by a local native in the late 1800s for his daughter's 8th birthday and is on display at the Fort de Buade Museum *(Tour Stop #26)*.
3. The Griffon

The first ship to ever sail the Great Lakes was ironically, the first Great Lakes shipwreck! The Griffon came to this bay in 1679 and fired a salvo from her cannons, which alarmed local Native Americans on shore. Those who had never seen a sailing vessel thought she may have been towed by a great sturgeon.

Rene-Robert Cavelier Sieur de La Salle built the Griffon near Niagara Falls. She sailed through the lower Great Lakes up to St. Ignace, then across to Wisconsin without trouble.

The Griffon was believed to have been 45 tons and 30 to 40 feet long with a single mast.

La Salle sent his men to Green Bay to load the vessel with furs while he traveled south on an expedition. The crew loaded her at Green Bay, Wisconsin, with a fortune of furs, then shot off their cannons and headed toward St. Ignace. That was the last the French saw of them. Following are a few of the stories and legends that abound concerning her fate:

- La Salle believed the crew stole the furs and scuttled the ship.
- Native Americans were blamed for the deed.
- A Native American legend tells that a prophet placed a curse on the Griffon and she sailed through a crack in the ice, fulfilling this curse.
- More logical is the explanation that local Native Americans gave to Father Hennepin. They told him that they warned the captain about the seas and told him to stay close to shore. The captain paid no heed and later they saw the ship being tossed violently during the storm on northern Lake Michigan.

The Griffon was lost more than 300 years ago and many have endeavored to find her. Her sudden disappearance remains a mystery today.
4. Commercial Fishing and Whitefish

The A-di-ka-mig, or whitefish, once swam through these waters in great numbers. Native American legend tells that Nanabozho* got the idea of how to catch whitefish while observing a spider weaving a web to catch flies.

Native Americans survived the winters here because hundreds of whitefish could be caught through the ice with gill nets. Alexander Henry, who wintered here in 1763, reported that whitefish exceeded trout as a delicious and nutritive food and were here in astonishing numbers.

After the fur trade died out, the Native Americans and French, long skilled in fishing these waters, joined the growing commercial fishing industry. Many Swedish fishermen came here from the Aland Islands and lent their skills to the business as well. Some of the old buildings along the walk are their fish houses. The white building, Superior Floorcovering, was once the Halberg Fishery. Just ahead, where this boardwalk ends, you will see an historic dock and will detour around the “Old Fish House.” The walk resumes on the other side of the old fishery.

Great Lakes commercial fishing is no easy task. The currents and winds are unpredictable and dangerous. Many fishermen have lost their lives here. A monument is placed near the city marina in honor of them. Today, commercial fishermen are Native Americans and great numbers of fish are still shipped out daily. Bags of fresh whitefish are brought directly to local restaurants as they are caught.

Remains of the Old Docks

Watch for groups of rock piles in the water along the shore. These rocks once filled wooden cribs as part of the old dock foundations.

*Ojibwa cultural hero featured in Longfellow’s Song of Hiawatha.
5. The Voyageurs

The voyageur's strength and endurance was legendary. Working 14 hours and averaging some 40 miles a day, he paddled, while singing, and carrying two 90 pound bundles over numerous portages*. Thousands of miles were measured by pipèe, or pipe breaks. Paddlers kept time with rhythmic songs. They were fun loving, embraced danger, and lived for joie de vivre or the “joy of living.” They shot down rough rapids at full speed, laughing in great glee. Artful skill in extreme peril was the badge of honor for which they existed.

Voyageurs, who ate rations from their pockets and hats, were sometimes perceived as dirty men without manners. Before approaching civilization they first cleaned and dressed up, then headed full speed toward waiting crowds in a fanciful display of skill and song.

A voyageur's attire was French/Native American mix. He wore a blanket coat or capot and a mere breech cloth when climbing in and out of a birch bark canoe. He plumed his hat with colored feathers, wore elaborately embroidered deer skin leggings with moccasins, and donned his waist with a bright red sash. The role of hivernant was distinguished by a black crow feather.

Local legend depicts Point La Barbe (see map, Page i) as the voyageurs’ “dressing room” at Mackinac. There they washed, shaved whiskers (barbs), put on regalia, and headed toward shore. Their singing could be heard all across this lake and weeks of celebration commenced!

*Portage - carry supplies and canoes overland to a connecting water.
†Pemmican - buffalo jerky-sometimes made with fat and dried berries.
The City of St. Ignace purchased the Jameison Dock with the goal of attracting Great Lakes Towing here with the star of their fleet, the wrecking tug Favorite (pronounced with a long i). The 139-foot tug started life as a steam passenger vessel and was converted for salvage work in 1890. Great Lakes bought the dock for $700 less than the city had paid. (Step six feet to your right and look at the wide dirt-topped Favorite Dock). Favorite was totally destroyed by fire at her dock in January 1907.

Immediately, Great Lakes Towing replaced her with the new 195-foot Favorite (3). In 1907, she was the largest and most powerful self-propelled salvage vessel on the Great Lakes and was used for the toughest salvage jobs. Requisitioned for government work by the U. S. Shipping Board in 1917, she served as USS Favorite in Maine, France, and Panama until 1948.

In 1919, Great Lakes Towing built Favorite (4) (and she did salvage service until 1954 and was scrapped four years later.)

Favorite on the wreck of the Eastland which rolled over with a loss of over 800 lives in the Chicago River (1915).
Residents built canoes and boats for their own use, but commercial boat building began here as early as the late 1600s. Canoes were offered for sale to traders, local military personnel, and in France. The Cheniers were an early boat building family, settling at the north part of town about 1830. They probably built different types of boats but were best known for their Mackinaw Boats. (Turn partway around to your right to see a real Mackinaw Boat, *Edith Jane*, in the glass viewing enclosure. Her information is on the street side. Return here to continue the tour).

For lighthouse duty, the U.S. Government commissioned Mackinaw Boats from the Cheniers, including one for the Spectacle Reef Lighthouse in 1893, which cost $260.

Rowboats and sailboats were also built here and on St. Helena Island. Locally made ice boats were sailed and raced on Lake Huron and Moran Bay in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Ignace Chenier (center) and helper, Jimmy Pond, with a newly completed Mackinaw Boat circa 1880.

*Edith Jane*, in the glass viewing enclosure. Her information is on the street side. Return here to continue the tour.

Iceboats sailing through the Round Island Passage, just south of Mackinac Island.
Winter was not a time of rest and leisure in historic St. Ignace. Prior to the arrival of Europeans (pre-contact), the Native Americans went to hunting camp. Living in crude portable shelters, the men hunted and trapped while the women carried home the catches and prepared the furs and meat.

Native Americans and, later, the French and Europeans, used dog sleds to travel in the winter. Dogs were the Native Americans' only domesticated animal and were used as pack animals, for sledding, and as food. In the 1800s, mail was delivered across the ice to Mackinac Island via dog sled and horse-drawn sleigh.

As winter turned to spring, Native Americans moved from hunting camp to sugar camp. Native Americans traded not only furs but maple sugar, corn, fish, sheets of cedar and birch bark, wild rice, and services with the early French. Maple sugar, kept fresh by burying it in the ground, was an important staple which is still available today.

Ice harvesting was also an important winter industry. Ice was cut in 22 inch square blocks and was measured in cords. Ice blocks covered in sawdust in ice houses would last through a summer of warm weather for delivery to local kitchens, meat markets, and fishermen. In 1922, ice merchant George Litchard cut 5,000 tons of ice, which was delivered to customers. Railroad cars were often used for distribution.

Important technology furthered the invention of the ice breaker in St. Ignace in 1888. Prior to that time, a boat stuck in the ice might remain so for the entire winter. Ice breaking techniques that were developed in St. Ignace were studied by the Russians, Danes, and Swedes. St. Ignace is still an important center of ice breaking activity and is home to the Coast Guard’s 140-foot ice breaker Biscayne Bay.
Lumberjacks worked in the woods mostly during the wintertime. After trees were felled, they were trimmed of branches, then transported by horse teams on iced skid roads to the nearest riverbanks. To facilitate sorting by owners, the end of each log was branded with a registered logmark by means of one blow with a heavy marking hammer. The stacked logs then waited on the shore for the spring snow melt. The fast high water carried the logs downstream to the lake and on to the sawmill.

In the late 1870s, Mackinaw Lumber Company built the first sawmill here. The mill was across the water and slightly to your left, in the area between the white rocks and the long white building. Under different names and owners, the mill was rebuilt after several fires and operated until 1955 in that spot. It is still known as the old mill slip. White Pine was the most abundant wood, but hardwoods were also cut. In this area, the forests provided lumber for building, wood for barrel staves, railroad ties, telephone poles, fence posts, cordwood for heating and cooking, veneer products, fuel for steamships, and to make charcoal for firing the ore smelters.
10. Men and Women in New France

• The average age of a woman when married in New France was 14. The average age of a man when married was 18.

• At first, the Jesuits refused to marry Native American women to French men. These marriages took place anyway. The term for a marriage performed without a priest's oversight is “country marriage.”

• A person who had Native American and European parents was known as a Metis.

• Native American women owned all the possessions, including crops and fields, cabins, and trade routes.

• While European women were not allowed to divorce and could be executed for having a baby out of wedlock, a Native American woman could divorce simply by putting the man's belongings out in the yard.

• The Algonquin (Ojibwa and Ottawa) tribes believed in polygamy and it was not unusual for a man to marry a woman and all of her sisters.

• In New France, the women were heavily involved in business. The Native American women traveled with the trappers and traders, processing the furs and tanning the hides. The French women lived in Quebec and Montreal and were responsible for negotiating contracts and signing leases.

• Though Mrs. Tonti and Mrs. Cadillac were credited with being the first European women in Michigan after their arrival in Detroit in 1702, there were Metis women in St. Ignace prior to 1700.
Steamship companies demanded that their captains stay on schedule no matter what the weather conditions and, coupled with fog, sudden storms, and heavy lake traffic, this resulted in the destruction of thousands of schooners, steamers, and barges. The floors of the Great Lakes are littered with these time capsules.

Divers come from all over the world to explore the underwater museums of the Straits of Mackinac, where wrecks and relics are well preserved, deep in the clear cold waters. The Straits are now an underwater park designated by the State of Michigan as a Great Lakes Bottomland Preserve, encompassing about 148 square miles.

Many wreck sites have long been known, but others are still being located. In 2002, divers found the three-masted schooner *William Young* lying in 125 feet of water just east of the Mackinac Bridge.

In addition to shipwrecks, smaller items are scattered over the bottom of the lake, sometimes in quite shallow water. All along the shore and among the old dock sites lie artifacts and relics of days gone by.

The wooden steamer *Eber Ward* hit ice and went down in about 140 feet of water, west of the Mackinac Bridge. Carrying a cargo of corn, she sank on her first trip of 1909 with a loss of five lives.
12. Car Ferries

In 1923, the Michigan State Ferry began transporting automobiles across the Straits of Mackinac between St. Ignace and Mackinaw City. Previously, a few autos rode the railroad ferries at a high cost of $40. In addition, as a safety precaution, gasoline was drained from each auto before loading and motorists were not compensated. The first car ferry, *Ariel*, brought the fare down to $2.50 or $3.50, depending on the auto's length.

Look toward the far left end of this dock at the building with a flag on top. This was formerly a two-story loading structure which contained a 10' x 30' Otis elevator capable of lifting 10,000 pounds to the ferries’ upper decks. Ferries landed at the end and on both sides of this dock. Straight ahead are silver cleats used to make fast the ferries' lines while loading. On busy days, as many as 9,000 automobiles were ferried.

Later, two additional sites were used. The Ore Dock became Dock #2, at the site of the current City Marina. One mile south of this was Dock #3, now a city park near Coast Guard Station St. Ignace. Dock #3 was built to accommodate the 360-foot *Vacationland*, the last ferry acquired. In all, there were eight Michigan State Ferries over the 34 years they were in service.
Overland roads being primitive and difficult to travel meant the water was most often used to move passengers and freight. By the 1870s, ferries were sailing along the coastline of the Upper Peninsula to serve the islands, small towns, and remote fishing and lumbering camps. The local ferry business evolved over the years, with changing partnerships and several company names at different times.

As roads were developed and improved, the coastal ferries were no longer needed and the ferry companies concentrated on the Mackinac Island routes. The former gospel ship *Glad Tidings* was reconfigured and renamed *Elva* to run the coastal and island routes. Even the railroad ferry *Algomah* became an island ferry.

On Sundays in the summer of 1895, one could enjoy a round trip to Mackinac Island, with a musical band aboard, for the special fare of 25¢.

The Revenue Cutter Service was a forerunner of the United States Coast Guard. The side-wheel cutter *William P. Fessenden*, sold and renamed *Chippewa*, became a Mackinac Island ferry in 1909.
The Third Ward School student body assembles to have their picture taken in the early 1900s. This sturdy brick K-6, located in the north part of town, served until the consolidation of schools in the 1950s.

Sightseeing was a popular pastime for tourists. This handsomely appointed surrey and team are on their way to Castle Rock.
These folks are watching boats from their campsite on Moran Bay. Beside the tent are a hammock and a bicycle to make “Kamp Komfort” (sign on tree) complete.

From the early 1920s, a locally-owned bus line transported passengers around the eastern Upper Peninsula. This 1926 version of the “yellow bus” sports a handy luggage rack on its roof.
Historic St. Ignace Walking Tour

Map numbers correspond to stops on the tour.
St. Ignace Walking Tour

Color routes designate shorter walking tours. See back page for highlights of these tours.
The Martel Furnace was an extensive smelting operation which made a high-quality steel for railcar wheels. Located on the current Coast Guard site, it was destroyed by fire in 1903.

The well-dressed guests at James Campbell’s hotel relax on the lawn after their 25¢ full dinner. Pictured between 1891 and 1912, the Dunham House was on State Street, almost at the corner of Spring Street. (See tour site #18)
In the early 1920s, State Street was still dirt. In 1925, the street was paved and the utility poles were relocated to the alley behind the shops on the right.

These surveyors lay out the route to prepare for construction of the road north of town. Castle Rock, in the left background, overlooks their work site.
14. Shipping

By the late 1700s, large sailing ships began service on the Great Lakes. These were the barques, brigs, and schooners affectionately referred to as tall ships today. Some carried passengers, but their cargo was what made them profitable. At their peak, 2,000 large sailing ships plied the waters of the Great Lakes. Typical cargo could include grain, ore, logs, lumber, ice, bark, barrels of salted fish, or even Christmas trees, to name just a few.

Steam powered ships slowly replaced the sailing ships. They were faster and carried hundreds of passengers and tons of freight on each trip.

Large cargo freighters were developed that could travel into all five Great Lakes after the 1855 opening of the locks in the St. Mary’s River at Sault Ste. Marie. As you walk along, you may see a freighter travel through the Round Island Passage between Mackinac Island and Round Island.

Now walk toward the City Marina building and around the left side of it. There, by the flags, you will see a schooner anchor displayed.

This four-masted schooner is typical of the mighty sailing ships of the past.
15. Rabbits Back Peak
St. Martin Islands

Rabbits Back Peak

If you look to the north, from this point onward you can see Rabbits Back Peak. It is a long point with a hill that juts out into Horseshoe Bay (See map on Page i). This rock formation is one of the many sea stacks in this area (Tour Stop #24). The peak was once called Wa-boo-zna-na-ba-did or “Sitting Rabbit” by the natives and is a legendary place of worship. In addition, Rabbits Back has long been associated with Nanabozho*, the hero of the Ojibwa who was known to take the form of a rabbit. Native Americans still offer tobacco to the guardian spirits there.

Rabbits Back Peak is the highest point of all the breccia formations in the area. It was not only a spiritual place but rendered a spectacular view in all directions. Native Americans would scout for schools of fish as well as look out for incoming enemies.

St. Martin Islands

There are two small islands to the left of Mackinac Island, these are Big and Little St. Martin. Two separate stories are told concerning their names:

- A November 1669 storm forced Jesuit Father Jean Claude Allouez to camp on the islands and wait out the weather. Allouez reported that he landed a birch bark canoe on Little St. Martin and made camp. When the storm seemed to dissipate, he attempted the lake again but was unable to proceed far and opted for the refuge of Big St. Martin Island. His journey to Green Bay was delayed nearly two weeks by the storm. Local legend says he named the islands after St. Martin because the storm subsided and he was able to leave the islands on November 11th, which was St. Martin's Day.

- The other story tells of a Mackinac soldier named Alexis St. Martin who was accidentally shot in the stomach. Alexis lived, but his wound never fully closed. A doctor was able to observe the workings of Alexis' stomach and how it digested different foods through the opening. Dr. William Beaumont published his findings of some 250 experiments, which was a major medical breakthrough in digestive studies at that time.

The islands are old burial grounds that are sacred to local Native Americans. Both St. Martin islands and Rabbits Back Peak are privately owned today.

*Longfellow's Hiawatha is based upon this character.
16. Railroad Ferries

The first railroad cars brought over the Straits were on the barge Betsy, pulled by the bulk steamer Algomah, in 1884. Four years later, longer shipping seasons were enhanced with the arrival of the ice breaking railroad ferry St. Ignace. Larger vessels carried on the ice breaking work and the 1911 arrival of Chief Wawatam brought even more ice crushing power. (You can walk out toward the lighthouse to read more about the Chief and her unloading procedures).

This photo, taken from where you now stand shows (from left), at the Chief Dock, the railroad ice breakers Sainte Marie I and St. Ignace. The two passenger steamships are at the Merchandise Dock (see warehouse roof above baggage cart). The nearest railroad track goes around the passenger depot (in right foreground) and out onto the Merchandise Dock.

The Merchandise Dock, then much longer and wider, was the main terminal for freight and passengers (see red and yellow boxcars). Steamships arrived and departed at the north side of the dock. Railroad tracks wound out on the south side, enabling trains to be loaded and unloaded at the far side of the warehouse, which ran up the center of the dock. Newspapers, cigars, and other items were offered for sale to tourists.

Trains and ships came together here, allowing passengers and freight to make transfers and continue on their journeys.
17. Mission Church and Cemeteries

Just across the street to your left (near where the gas station now stands) was an early French mission church. The French, who received land grants in St. Ignace when the Americans came to Mackinac Island, began to gather in greater numbers here. By the 1830s they had petitioned for a church, and the first St. Ignatius Loyola Church was built. In 1954, the church was moved to Marquette Mission Park and now houses the Museum of Ojibwa Culture.

Beside the Mission Church on the corner of McCann Street was an 18th century Catholic cemetery, perhaps the oldest official cemetery in the City of St. Ignace. The graves in the cemetery were relocated when the new Catholic church was built. An old legend claims that the congregation built new wooden coffins for the removal of the remains, however, finding the remains disintegrated, they were placed in a mass grave in the new cemetery and the coffins were used as fish boxes.

Unofficial cemeteries can be found throughout St. Ignace. These burials, which are frequently found by excavators, utility workers, and even household gardeners, are most likely the result of thousands of years of Native American occupancy. The burial sites, too numerous to identify individually, frequently are on the edge of the hills circling the lower land along the bay.

Old Mission Church was built about 1837 on land donated by Louis Martin, whose father was one of the original land claimants (Tour Stop #19). This historic building is now in use as the Museum of Ojibwa Culture (Tour Stop #29).
You can see the three distinct parts that made up the Hotel Northern. The steps at the far left are the ones you see today.

These stairs are all that remain of the Hotel Northern. In 1921, entrepreneurs Welch and Hemm bought the older Dunham House and LeClerc Hotel and built a middle section between them.

A 1925 advertisement states that 84 guest rooms, 27 with private baths, were available from $1.50 to $3.50 per day. The hotel also offered a large dining room, café service on the porch, a ballroom, and a billiard parlor, all with views overlooking the Straits.

Tourists came here to enjoy the healthful climate. The cool breezes were a welcome change from crowded cities. The Hay Fever Association was organized locally to promote this region to tourists, especially sufferers of hay fever and asthma. This area was regarded as second only to the Alps for hay fever relief.
Private land claims were originally created by the French. Unlike subdivisions today, the lots were usually less than 200 feet wide by the distance a man could walk in a day. This allowed for the habitant, the French farmer, to have land for wood cutting at the rear of the property, pasture, farm buildings, a residence near the lake, and a boat launch. (Remember, all transportation was by boat or canoe in the 1600s and 1700s.) These “ribbon farms” also provided the habitants with extra security, as neighbors were nearby in case of an attack.

With the coming of the American government, the French were forced to prove they were the rightful owners of the Private Claims under French rule. In 1823, a commission convened on Mackinac Island and affidavits were gathered attesting to the ownership of each ribbon farm.

There were 19 established farms at St. Ignace, all south of the site of the Jesuit Mission. Two were never claimed.

The original land claimants included several famous fur trade names and families like Bertrand, Hamlin, Bourassa, Chevalier, and Ezekiel Solomon, the first Jewish person in Michigan who was captured and survived the siege at Fort Michilimackinac in Mackinaw City.

The first 19 private land claim divisions. Most of the streets in town run along the old claim lines and some still bear the name of the first land claimants. Truckey was an original land claimant. The French surname Trottier was later corrupted to Truckey.
20. Bentley’s B-n-L Café

Bentley's Café is an historic soda fountain and ice cream parlor and has remained a favorite eatery for local residents. Beula Bentley, then a summer employee, purchased the café from Dewey Snyder in 1940. Snyder had moved the building from across the street by pulling it over logs with a team of horses. This café was once a large source of employment in the area and was open 24 hours a day, all year.

An early photograph of Bentley’s. The counters are still used.

During the construction of the Mackinac Bridge, the upstairs of the café was converted into a boarding house for steel workers.

This small café retains its original counters, stools, and booths. Tourists and locals can enjoy sundaes, ice cream, and hamburgers today in the friendly atmosphere representing the bygone “Happy Days” era.
21. Colonial House

The Colonial House began as a humble residence. The site and small house were traded by the St. Antoine family to the Chambers family in exchange for a parcel of land further north. The Chambers family, who had emigrated from County Mayo, Ireland, in the late 1840s, built onto the house and prospered in St. Ignace.

Members of the Chambers family held several municipal offices and owned various businesses and a warehouse and dock across the street. In 1923, they sold the dock and warehouse to the State of Michigan for the state car ferry landing.

The Chambers family home circa 1900.
22. Banking History

In earlier years, financial matters were handled by the government or private individuals. By 1880, Mackinaw Lumber Company had become the busiest financial brokerage here. In 1888, Otis Johnson and Senator Francis Stockbridge bought out W.A. Burt's seven-year-old private bank and formed First National Bank with $50,000 of capital stock.

The initial location of First National, and of Burt’s bank before that, had been in one-half of a building just north of here.

The first telephone switchboard was installed on the second floor of Burt’s bank in 1883 and served 15 local-service-only telephones. St. Ignace had the last manual switchboards in Michigan, with direct dial not arriving until 1974. You can view one of the last switchboards at the Chamber of Commerce (560 North State Street, next door to tour stop #29).

First National Bank's second building – built around 1902 – located in what is now the parking lot to your left.
St. Ignace was growing and prospering, helped along by the lumbering boom. Iron ore arrived to feed the Martel Furnace (the smelter employed 250 men). The city became a hub of railroad and shipping interests, which also attracted tourists to visit and products and merchandise to pass in and out of the area.

The waterfront was lined with huge docks and the bay teemed with ferries, ships, and fishing boats. It was not unusual to see up to five large steamships loading from one dock at the same time.

Downtown offered many hotels and stores of all sorts along the wooden sidewalks. One could buy almost anything, including a piano or organ, a new-fangled sewing machine, or imported cigars, have a photograph made, or join the latest fad by purchasing a "wheel" (as bicycles were called). By the 1880s, St. Ignace was the Mackinac County seat and had three newspapers, a federal court, and a post office.

In the evening, one could stroll under the soft light of gas lamps to the theater or opera house, or dance at a hotel. After 1895, the Round Island Lighthouse (built by a local contractor) provided the first beacon visible from town.

After the Financial Panic of 1893, residents of St. Ignace were hopeful as they looked forward to the dawning of a new century.
St. Anthony's Rock is one of the many limestone formations known as sea stacks in the St. Ignace area. These prominent breccia masses were formed when the forces of erosion worked against cemented chunks of rock. Throughout history, these rock formations have captured the interest of different cultures. Over time they have been used for practical, commercial, and spiritual purposes.

Outside of town on U.S. 2 is a roadside park that features a view of the Straits of Mackinac and the Mackinac Bridge. The park is actually built on top of a sea stack.

Castle Rock, another well known sea stack, is used as a tourist attraction. For a small fee, tourists can climb the long stairway and see a panoramic view of Mackinac Island and the surrounding area.

Native Americans used sea stacks as lookouts, hence Castle Rock's other name, Pontiac's Lookout. Native Americans, in history and today, place spiritual significance on the sea stacks and believe that spirits dwell within the stacks. One unidentified stack in town was even given the name Gebi-wau-beek, or Ghost Rock.

St. Anthony's Rock was once used as a bandstand. It had a stairway running up the back side and a stage was built on top for concerts.
The Edgar House was located two doors to your left and included the hotel and a large billiard parlor from 1881 until it burned in 1908.

From early times, tourists, transients, and off-season lumberjacks with their winter’s wages, crowded into town. To accommodate them, there were many stores and shops downtown among the hotels and boarding houses. One could patronize grocery stores, hardwares, saloons, billiard parlors, bakeries, barber shops, blacksmiths, restaurants, cafés, livery stables, tailors, or even a Chinese laundry, to name only a few.

For entertainment, there was always something going on, like horse races, turkey shoots, logger festivals, sailboat races, church bazaars, picnics, music and entertainment at the opera house, or dancing at hotels.

Over the years, the old wooden hotels have all fallen to fire or wrecking crews. This hotel was built in 1928 as the two-story Traveler's Hotel. It originally housed a restaurant at the rear of its first floor and offered indoor shared bathrooms upstairs. Very faintly, you can read the faded old lettering, “52 steam heated rooms,” if you step around the corner to your right and look (vertically) along the front edge of that side of the building.
26. Fort de Buade

The building was once the first garage in town. The first automobile entered its doors in 1910. Built by Chester Wing, Sr., it was later purchased by Dr. Donald Benson, who transformed the back portion into a museum and ran various businesses in the front shops, including the WIDG radio station.

Sometime during the late 1600s a French military fort was built in St. Ignace. St. Ignace was the home of several forts protecting the Native villages and the Jesuit compound.

According to Cadillac, commandant of the fort in the 1690s, there were three parallel rows of pickets, driven into the ground at a distance apart for extra security. A deep trench likely surrounded the fort to keep out invaders. The view from the fort was said to be excellent so the enemy could be spotted a long way off.

As one of the oldest European forts on the Great Lakes, information on the exact location, construction, and fortifications remain a mystery today. It was likely rebuilt several times from the 1670s through the 1690s.

Even the name of the fort is not clear. Historic texts refer to the fort as Fort Michilimackinac, Fort St. Ignace, and even Fort Frontenac. Later, in the 1690s, it was named Fort de Buade after a French Governor, Louis de Buade, Compte de Frontenac. Local people claim the fort was on a hill. Some historians claim it was on the shore (Tour Stop #1). According to the historic marker (Tour Stop #27), the museum itself is located on or near the fort site.

The mystery of Fort de Buade, obscured by the French language, fascinates amateur researchers. Small groups continue to avidly search for clues, taking stock in the fact that the location of Fort St. Joseph in Niles, Michigan, another late-1600s fur trade fort, was only discovered in 2002.

The Fort de Buade Museum, purchased by the City of St. Ignace in 2007 with funding from the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, is operated by the Michilimackinac Historical Society. It houses a collection of some 3,500 relics arranged to reflect the Mackinac Triangle of History (see Page i). It is a fascinating walk through history and free of charge.
Though settled in 1671, St. Ignace did not become a city until 1883. A small section of State Street (our main thoroughfare) and a few short side streets were the only passable roads at that time. Several buildings had to be moved out of the middle of State Street to develop a straightaway. City Hall and the firehouse were located together in the same building, a few doors south of here and on the lake side of the street. This bell rang from that location to mark the 10 p.m. curfew. At the rear of the roof was a siren to alert whenever there was a fire. The volunteer fire department was organized in 1883 and at first used hand-pulled hose carts. Later, horse-drawn steam pumpers were utilized until city hydrants became available.

In 1939, this building was constructed as a WPA (Works Progress Administration) project. The site included a residence, a hotel, and two smaller stores. All four were purchased and demolished to make room for this Municipal Building and Fire Station #1.

The town's biggest fire completely destroyed the 200 room Cadillac Hotel in 1911.
28. Railroads

The first railroad came to St. Ignace about 1879. The main railroad grade ran along the lower ridge behind these businesses, all the way through town and south to Martel Furnace (See centerfold map.).

A switchyard was located in the area now occupied by Little Bear East and the roundhouse was just south of it, across Marquette Street. (See these two sites behind tour stop #29.)

There were several rail spurs. One took trains to the lumber mill and two others headed toward the docks. To avoid vehicle traffic, the spur to the Ore Dock (now the marina site) was an elevated trestle crossing over State Street near Truckey Street. (This is near tour stop #19.)

Near Spring Street, a third spur brought trains across State Street at ground level. It served the Chief Dock, the Merchandise Dock, and the passenger depot. It also linked to a short dead end track used to store boxcars in the current American Legion Park area.

Later, removal of the tracks left a corridor which is now used for parking (along Chambers Alley), hiking, and recreational vehicles. This corridor connects to the North Country Trail to North Dakota.
Archaeologists have proved that Native Americans have lived in St. Ignace for 4,000 years. Evidence indicates the area was most actively occupied during the last 2,000 years.

Tribes were nomadic, moving seasonally from winter hunting grounds to sugar camp and back to St. Ignace in the spring for trading and rendezvous. The primary tribes, the Huron (Wyandot), Chippewa (Ojibwa), and Odawa (Ottawa), traded here with various tribes such as the Dakota (Lakota or Sioux), Pottawatomi, Miami, Fox (Loup), and later the French and other Europeans. Villages here included the Huron Refugee Village which was immediately north (right) of the Jesuit Mission (believed to be at the site of the Museum of Ojibwa Culture). Further north of that was the local Ottawa village.

The area was deforested, both out of necessity and likely for safety, for a distance of nine miles. Corn fields also surrounded the village. Nets likely rested on the shores. The Huron refugees had huge long houses, more than 100 feet long. The local Odawa lived in wigwams made of bark. There was little game in the area and records from the time state that it was necessary to travel a distance to find large game.

The Native Americans protected themselves from the Iroquois and each other by using picket forts. The Huron and Odawa did not trust each other, speak the same language, or have the same customs. The Huron, refugees from the Georgian Bay area, resided here about 30 years then moved south to Detroit. Many of the Odawa and Chippewa families stayed nearby, settling in the area or across the Straits of Mackinac near Cross Village. Fifty-nine percent of the students attending St. Ignace Area Schools have Native American blood, many descendants of the Chippewa and Odawa of centuries ago.
Taking The History Tour

Scenic Boardwalk Details
Take a leisure day and tour historic St. Ignace FREE. Bring a lunch, take in a restaurant, or cook out at one of the parks and let the kids play.
- The boardwalk follows the shoreline from Kiwanis Beach to Wawatam Lighthouse Dock.
- You may access it from anywhere in town.
- The boardwalk is safe for children and has many benches and scenic lookouts.
- Visit the Chamber of Commerce or Visitors Bureau for weekly entertainment and special events listings to complement your tour.

For detailed information about the downtown area, check one of the 17 outdoor interactive maps placed by the DDA throughout town.

Three Ways To Take A Shorter Tour
See Center Map for Tour Layout

Early Historic Section
A - [29, 1-5, 26] Tour 2 FREE city museums and take in a beautiful stroll on the shoreline boardwalk through the Early Native/French Historic District.


Before the Bridge - Great Lakes Shipping
B - [6 to 16] This walk takes you down most of the boardwalk and describes the historic docks, ships, railroads, ferries and area islands.


Old Town and the Good Old Days
C - [17 to 28] Stroll down the nostalgic brick walk on Main Street with stories of the good old days.


For further information on Historical Society projects, volunteer opportunities, to join, or to donate contact: Michilimackinac Historical Society/Fort de Buade Museum, 334 North State Street, St. Ignace, Michigan 49781 or call (906)643-6627