

By Katherine Rodeghier

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They came by the thousands every summer.

Wealthy city dwellers from Chicago and cities as far as the East Coast traveled to Northern Michigan to escape the choking smoke, stifling heat and industrial grit plaguing urban areas at the end of the 19th century. Lake steamers docked along Little Traverse Bay, south of the Straits of Mackinac, and when the railroad arrived in 1873 the population of the tiny town of Petoskey took off. By the turn of the last century it had grown to 6,000 full-time inhabitants, swelling to 125,000 in the summer as trains unloaded as many as 5,000 passengers a day.

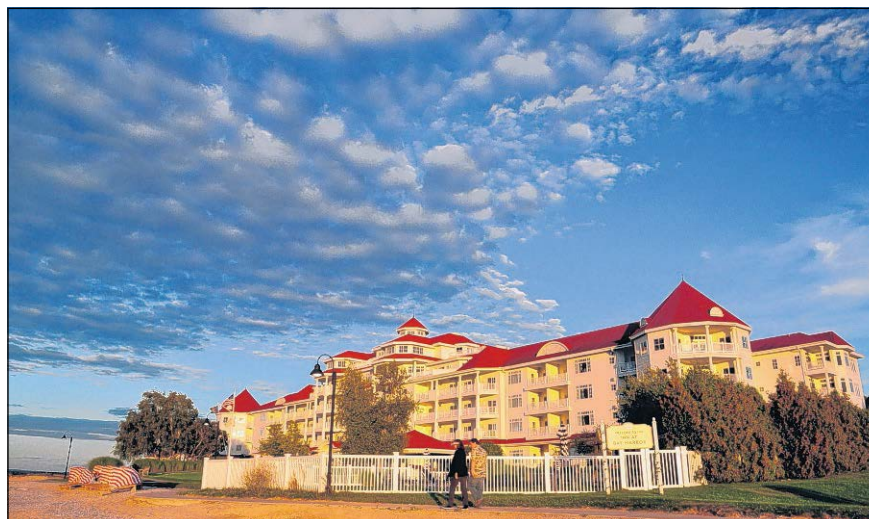
And they're still coming.

The preferred mode of transport isn't a boat or train these days, but the family auto loaded with golf clubs, beach blankets and other gear needed for a summer getaway in one of Northern Michigan's most popular resort areas.

While the epicenter lies in Petoskey, this vacation playground encompasses a cluster of resort communities, some still sporting their Victorian roots in graceful mansions and grand hotels, others showing off modern resort amenities.

Take Bay Harbor, for instance. This luxury community sits on the site of a cement factory that churned out 80 percent of the concrete in the Mackinac Bridge. The factory came down in 1995 in what was the nation's largest land reclamation project at the time. Up went a yacht club and marina, upscale shops and restaurants, and the Bay Harbor Golf Club, one of the top three public courses in Michigan.

The Inn at Bay Harbor, part of Marriott's prestigious Autograph Collection, looks like a grand Victorian hotel sprawled along the shoreline, but it and its rental cottages sit squarely in the 21st century. Travel & Leisure magazine lists it among the top 500 hotels in the world.



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

**Don't let the design of the Inn at Bay Harbor fool you. It may look like a grand old hotel from the Victorian era, but it's relatively new.**

On the opposite shore of Little Traverse Bay, Harbor Springs dates back more than a century. This old-money community, built by the captains of industry back in the day, remains an affluent enclave. Its private neighborhood on Harbor Point is so exclusive, motorized vehicles are banned. Even in this day and age anyone permitted onto the point must take a horse and carriage. In Harbor Springs' small downtown the hoi polloi are welcome to browse the shops but won't be grabbing lunch at a fast-food restaurant — they're not allowed.

Petoskey's larger downtown takes a step back in time at its Gaslight Shopping District where real gaslights illuminate summer nights. Independent shops and boutiques beckon, including the Rocking Horse Toy Company, Symons General Store housed in the town's oldest brick building, and Ward & Eis Gallery where the fine handicrafts of Native American artisans figure prominently in displays. The gallery gives a portion of its sales to local charities.

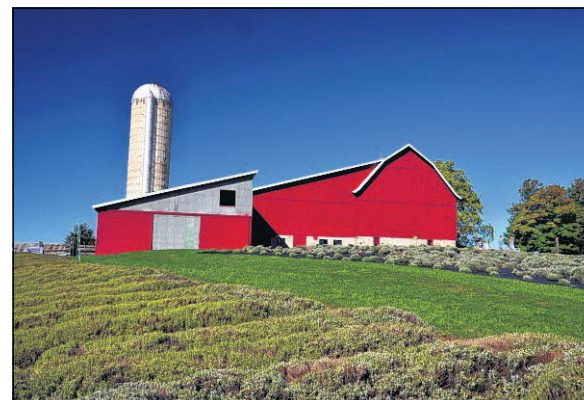
Just one of 20 of Petoskey's grand old hotels still stands a short walk away. Stafford's Perry Hotel dates from 1899, but its 79 rooms have been updated with such modern amenities as air conditioning and Wi-Fi. An old-fashioned trolley departs from the hotel on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays in summer for free tours of Petoskey with a stop at Bay View a few miles east of town.

Chautauquas, those traveling shows

and cultural assemblies that were all the rage in the 19th century, live on in Bay View. Founded in 1875 as a Methodist campsite, the community's 440 Victorian cottages make it a National Historic Landmark. Visitors take self-guided walking tours to admire these colorful painted ladies. Two museums open to the public during the summer when the Bay View Association hosts its music festival and program of lectures, concerts and adult education classes. The eight-week season includes music from classical to pops, jazz to opera with the musical "Pippin" and opera "Carmen" on the program this summer.

Of course, summer means trips to the beach and in the Petoskey area vacationers divide their time between lolling in the sand and hunting for Petoskey stones. Michigan's official state stone looks like the surface of the moon in miniature, but the circles on its surface aren't craters, but bits of fossilized coral. One of the best places to search for them is the 1,000 feet of Little Traverse Bay shoreline at Magnus City Park Beach, walking distance from downtown Petoskey.

Visitors who leave Little Traverse Bay behind for other forms of recreation find a pair of ski resorts, Boyne Mountain and Boyne Highlands, that turn to horseback riding, hiking, biking and, of course, golf in summer. Michigan tops the nation in numbers of golf



• Information for this article was gathered during a writers' conference sponsored by the Petoskey Area Visitors Bureau.

**When August rolls around, the grounds around Lavender Hill Farm are a sea of color.**

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## travel

courses and more than half in north-west Michigan have a PGA slope rating of 120 or above.

Visitors who'd prefer to take in the scenery on a drive rather than walk a fairway head into the countryside. They might motor along Walloon Lake where Ernest Hemingway spent much of his boyhood in a summer home still in the author's family. An old-fashioned general store in nearby Horton Bay has memorabilia related to the novelist, a frequent customer.

Up the road, Lavender Hill Farm makes a worthwhile stop in July and early August when its 25 varieties of lavender usually reach full bloom. Guests tour the grounds, walk a seven-circuit labyrinth, sip lavender lemonade and enjoy scoops of lavender ice cream. The gift shop stocks all manner of lavender items, including essential oil made with a still on site. During Fridays on the Farm, through Aug. 25, visitors can try their hand at making a lavender hand-icraft and enjoy live musical performances on Friday, Aug. 4.

A drive along Lake Charlevoix ends in the city of Charlevoix on Lake Michigan. Among its claims to fame are the Hobbit-like Earl Young houses. A brochure from the Chamber of Commerce takes travelers past about two dozen of these distinct buildings dubbed "mushroom houses" for their undulating lines, curvy cedar shake roofs and rustic stone walls. Young studied architecture in college for just one year before moving on to a 60-year career in real estate, designing the whimsical homes on the side. Most date from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Drivers on the main route through town can't help but notice the petunias lining the roadside. When the weather warms in late spring between 800 and 1,000 Charlevoix residents launch Operation Petunia. In just a few hours they put 70,000 of the plants into the ground along five miles of U.S. Route 31. The idea grew out of a 1982 beautification campaign and enthusiasm for it shows no sign of wilting these many years later.

Planting petunias, it seems, remains just one of many traditions in the Petoskey area.