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Imagining a Pure Michigan Landscape: Advertisers, Tourists, and the Making of Michigan's Northern Vacationlands

By
Camden Burd

In 2008 Michigan launched a rebranding of its tourism industry. The state's politicians, and Governor Jennifer Granholm, supported an unprecedented budget centered on advertising Michigan's forests, rivers, and lakes. This "Pure Michigan" campaign attempted to connect with the audience's sense of nostalgia, a longing for tranquility, and the restorative potential of a communion with nature that was untouched, uninhabited, and idyllic. In the midst of economic recession, the campaign succeeded by tapping into a larger, cultural construction of the natural world that required onlookers to *imagine* a pure Michigan landscape.¹

Though advertisers encouraged audiences to imagine Michigan's landscape as an unspoiled tourist destination, this was not always the nature of the relationship between residents and the state's environment. Vacationing only developed in the years following the Civil War when Americans began to romanticize Michigan's nature and gave it the transcendent qualities that remain in tourists' imaginations today. But then, as now, tourists never entered untouched landscapes, for there is no such thing as a "pure" landscape—all are imagined.

Sometimes overly optimistic, ironic, and even misleading, a history of environmental imaginations tends to tell us more about the mindsets of human actors than environmental realities. As tourists flocked to Michigan's vacationlands in the late nineteenth century, they did so as a reaction to the urbanized landscapes of their daily lives. Boosters, advertisers, and tourists constructed vacationland landscapes to answer larger cultural concerns of the era. Like today's "Pure Michigan" advertisements, nineteenth-century Americans imagined a Michigan

¹Ellen Creager, "30-Million Ad Blitz Aims to Ease the Tourism Slump in Michigan," *Detroit Free Press*, 13 September 2008.

environment where they could escape the perceived stresses, anxieties, and troubles of the modern world.²

Historian Aaron Shapiro's *Lure of the North Woods: Cultivating Tourism in the Upper Midwest* effectively illustrates the ways in which local, state, and federal organizations hoped to rejuvenate the economies in sections of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula throughout the twentieth century. Shapiro argues that "the market's intrusion into the nineteenth-century countryside . . . exploited natural resources, altered lives, and transformed the landscape," concluding that "twentieth-century advocates hoped tourism could diversify the economy and address land-use concerns."³ Though Shapiro believes this environmental transformation was a product of both environmental reality and economic necessity in the twentieth century, he overlooks the earlier cultural transformations that both enabled and supported the economic diversification he outlines. The cultural roots of this environmental transformation took shape decades prior due to Americans' shifting attitudes about nature. An examination of advertisements and tourist activities indicates that the landscapes of northern Michigan came to represent an idyllic respite from the urban landscapes of the industrial Midwest. Thus, it is first necessary to grasp this cultural transformation in order to understand Michigan's broader, tourism-based economy of the twentieth century. Advertisements, and the tourists who consumed them, helped to redefine Michigan's northern landscapes. In turn, both advertisers and tourists began to imagine that the act of heading north erased anxieties, boosted health, and provided opportunities to connect with, what many believed to be, a disappearing "primitive" landscape.

The northern portion of the Lower Peninsula differs from its southern portion in both soil and climate.⁴ Because much of the state lies in northern latitudes, many portions of northern Michigan have short growing seasons—as short as 70-100 days in some regions. These short

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread and Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006); Eric D. Olmanson, *The Future City on the Inland Sea: A History of Imagined Geographies of Lake Superior* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 9-16. For a literature-based study of the writings regarding Michigan and the Upper Midwest, see John Knott, *Imagining the Forest: Narratives of Michigan and the Upper Midwest* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

³ Aaron Shapiro. *The Lure of the North Woods: Cultivating Tourism in the Upper Midwest* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xiii.

⁴ Mining communities often experience boom and bust economies that in turn lead to temporary periods of high populations, and thus they do not have the sustained settlement patterns of an agricultural-based economy.

seasons—compounded with mostly sandy soils—hindered traditional agricultural settlement in regions north of the 44th parallel.⁵ The ecological realities of the northern section of Michigan ensured that most of these landscapes remained rural. Unlike promoters of today’s tourist industry, Americans carried different attitudes towards the northern Michigan environment.

In 1820, the US Government tasked Lewis Cass, the Territorial Governor of Michigan, to explore the Great Lakes region and report on its environmental characteristics and the disposition of indigenous groups towards non-Natives. Naturalist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft was part of the expedition and wrote a detailed outline of Michigan’s environmental attributes. His journal highlights early American views of nature in an era marked by national growth both geographically and economically and shows how he imagined and valued Michigan’s landscapes. Unlike advertising agencies touting a “Pure Michigan” nearly two centuries later, Schoolcraft saw something else of value in Michigan’s environments. He appreciated, for example, the beauty of Detroit:

The banks of the river present a compact settlement along the American shore, in which the succession of farm houses, orchards, and cultivated fields, is in no place interrupted by forests, or even, by detached copses of woods. Every thing bears the appearance of having been long settled and well improved . . . all served to imprint a character of mildness and beauty upon the scene.⁶

Note that Schoolcraft admired the “improved” nature, not an undeveloped landscape. He imagined a pastoral landscape cleared of forests, tilled, and settled.

When Schoolcraft passed Saginaw Bay during the same expedition, he imagined the future of the Michigan landscape:

⁵ Gordon G. Whitney, “An Ecological History of the Great Lakes Forest of Michigan,” *Journal of Ecology* 75 (1987): 667-84.

⁶ Henry Schoolcraft, “Narrative Journal of Travels Through Northwestern Regions of the United States extending from Detroit through the Great Chain of American Lakes to the Sources of the Mississippi River in the Year 1820,” *Schoolcraft’s Narrative Journal of Travels*, ed. Mentor L. Williams (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992), 59; Duane Paul Mosser, “Henry Rowe Schoolcraft: Eyewitness to a Changing Frontier” (PhD diss., University of California Santa Barbara, 1991), 1-50.

These lands have recently been disposed of to the United States government, and will shortly be thrown into market. From the terms of high admiration of which all continue to speak of the riches of the soil, the natural beauty of the country, and its central and advantageous position for business, we are led to suppose that it presents uncommon incitements to enterprising and industrious farmers and mechanics.⁷

Schoolcraft defined Saginaw Bay's "natural beauty of the country" in terms of its value as a site for potential cultivation and a great industrial hub for future residents.

Schoolcraft's 1820 imagination ignored certain demographic realities of early nineteenth-century Michigan. When he described the landscapes surrounding the rich copper deposits along the Ontonagon River as "beyond the boundaries of man," Schoolcraft had difficulty imagining how Americans could possibly settle such a remote and rugged environment. Yet, in a passage written just before he dismissed the landscape as uninhabitable, he noted an impressive sturgeon fishery managed by the Ojibwe on the Ontonagon River. Perhaps Schoolcraft should have been more specific about what type of "men" he believed would settle in Michigan. His imagination, much like that of Indian policy makers of the time, selectively excluded a large population of Indians that had inhabited the region long before his tour. "The rural beauty of the country—its advantageous position for commerce [and] delightful climate," he wrote of one river valley, "will probably hereafter, when the Indian tribes yield before an industrious emigration, support one of the most compact, extensive, and valuable agricultural settlements." Such words reflected a nineteenth-century vision of progress, or manifest destiny. Schoolcraft acknowledged, and even celebrated in some ways, the ability of indigenous populations to thrive in the region, but he could not help but place his own cultural vision on the landscape.⁸

In order to turn imaginative landscapes into realities, Americans worked hard to alter Michigan's physical landscape. Once renowned for its fish runs and fur trade, the St. Marys River was defaced in the name of

⁷ Schoolcraft, *Narrative Journal of Travels*, 73.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 121-23, 244; For an overarching history of Michigan copper-mining history see Larry Lankton, *Hollowed Ground: Copper Mining and Community Building on Lake Superior, 1840s-1990s* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010).

progress. The fur trade gave way to the ideas of industrialists, who were mostly concerned with the efficient transportation of iron and copper from the Upper Peninsula to larger southern markets. The imaginations of a few capitalists overpowered the concerns of the Ojibwe and Frenchmen that had made the St. Marys fish runs a cornerstone of their social and economic lives. The construction of the Soo Locks in 1855 destroyed large portions of fish habitat but opened a new economic avenue for those looking to make money in the lumber, steel, and copper industries.⁹

With industry came an infrastructure suited to moving resources to larger urban areas such as Chicago, Indianapolis, and Detroit. Railroads crisscrossed Michigan in an attempt to reach resources once deemed remote. Lumber companies valued Michigan's environments for their potential profits, while few nineteenth-century Americans valued Michigan's forests for their recreational qualities. Through rapid extraction, industrialists moved material quickly to ready markets, and lumbermen removed huge tracts of forests at an unprecedented rate. From 1869-1909, 16.8 billion board feet of lumber were removed from Michigan and shipped to larger cities. As a result, lake cities became hubs. Railroads brought lumber, minerals, and agricultural goods from the hinterland within reach to urban consumers. Industrialists envisioned Michigan's landscapes as an outlet for cheap and plentiful resources that in turn translated to high profits at the expense of the environment.¹⁰

Railroad companies, in particular, aimed to profit from the accessible natural resources along their new lines. After being granted land by Congress in 1856, the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company first focused its efforts on selling land to farmers. In 1866 its President, Samuel Hanna, was primarily focused on the acquisition of natural resources. Hanna and his investors built the line, which ran from Fort Wayne, Indiana, to Petoskey, Michigan, to extract lumber and farm goods for transport to larger markets. In his company's annual reports, Hanna presented Michigan in economic, not aesthetic, terms, emphasizing

⁹ W. Bruce Bowlus, *Iron Ore Transport on the Great Lakes: The Development of a Delivery System to Feed American Industry* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2010), 53-89; Michael P. Ripley, "Environmental History of the St. Marys River," *Journal of Great Lakes Research* 37.2 (2011): 5-11.

¹⁰ For reading on Michigan lumber industry see Theodore J. Karamanski, *Deep Woods Frontier: A History of Logging in Northern Michigan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991); Michael Williams, *Americans and Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 222-30.

northern Michigan's fertile farmlands and abundant pine. The company's description centered on exposing, removing, and profiting from the newly acquired lands, not tourism.¹¹

Railroads were not the only infrastructure used to extract inland resources. Americans dug and dredged canals in order to make forests accessible by water. Such techniques required digging several tons of mud and silt from swampy lands in order to connect bodies of water. One of the most prominent canals in Michigan connected Petoskey's Little Traverse Bay to Cheboygan, creating a navigable path through Michigan's Lower Peninsula. By connecting Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, the canal circumvented an otherwise longer route through the Mackinac Straits. Renowned writer and fisherman Charles Hallock described the dredging while on a fishing trip in the area: "Just above our place at the landing the channel has been dredged and deepened," he wrote, "and the sand thrown out on either side is kept from drifting into the stream again by long rows of piles and planking." One would expect the avid fisherman to condemn the dredging, yet Hallock continued: "The bottom is irregular, and from the deepest holes one can take bass with a fly while standing on the bank."¹² Dredging the canal allowed lumber companies to transport chopped pine, spruce, and hemlock to port cities along the lakes. Hallock recognized that the work fundamentally altered the surrounding landscapes, but the acclaimed outdoorsman did not identify dredging as a harmful activity that destroyed stream and riverbeds necessary for fish reproduction. Instead it was progress, a landscape transformed for the better. Even while fishing Hallock saw dredging as coexisting with natural abundance.¹³

Such canals and railroads interlaced much of the eastern United States by the end of the nineteenth century. The Midwest was particularly

¹¹ *Map of the land grant of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company* (New York: G.W. & C.B. Colton & Co., 1870); Marie Johnson, "The Building of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad," *Indiana Magazine of History* 41.2 (1945): 152-66; *An exhibit of affairs of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad* (Fort Wayne: Daily Gazette Job Office, 1866).

¹² Charles Hallock, *Vacation Rambles in Northern Michigan* (Grand Rapids: Passenger Department of Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company, 1878), 29.

¹³ United States War Department, *Inland water route between Cheboygan and Petoskey, Mich: Letter from the Secretary of war, transmitting, with a letter from the chief of engineers, report of examination of inland water route in Michigan between Cheboygan, on Lake Huron, and Petoskey, on Lake Michigan. December 14, 1909*, 61st Congress, 2d sess., House Document 303 (Washington, DC, 1909); John L. Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 195-224.

characterized by a web of rail lines connecting hinterland and urban space. Larger cities such as Detroit, Chicago, and Milwaukee matured into industrial cities by connecting the rich resources formerly inaccessible to industrialists to eastern and western markets. Companies such as the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad benefited from a blend of cheap resource extraction and American industrialization. Because of their new role as urban centers of exchange, Midwestern cities grew at tremendous rates. Chicago grew from a small swampy settlement in 1830 to the second largest city in the United States by 1890. It appeared that by the end of the nineteenth century Schoolcraft's imagination had become a reality for many locations of the Great Lakes region, and he hoped for similar development along the Saginaw Bay.¹⁴

Unfortunately, those cities had developed quickly, often with little planning or foresight and with problems unimaginable to Schoolcraft. Chicago and Detroit had a reputation for pollution, and garbage-lined streets and polluted waterways were just a few of the unfortunate byproducts of industrialization in the name of progress. Pollutants in nineteenth-century American cities held more significance than simple aesthetics. Historian Adam Rome's research into nineteenth-century cultural understandings of pollution tracks the changing vocabulary used by those coming to terms with the negative effects of an industrial world. Rome argues that for middle-class Americans in the latter part of the century the term "pollution" held more moral and religious meaning than an observation of urban aesthetics. "Pollutants" not only threatened the natural surroundings but also, more importantly, the moral fiber of society. Likewise, late nineteenth-century scientists began using the term "pollution" more commonly, and it came to represent the growing modern world.¹⁵

Thus was born a new, modern citizen—the "sufferer," an often upper-middle class or wealthier city-dweller who had experienced pollution's ill effects both environmentally and morally. New ailments developed alongside the growth of cities. Hay fever expanded into American consciousness in eastern cities as early as the 1830s, especially among wealthy industrialists. Irritated by dusts and seasonal pollens, hay fever sufferers began looking to escape the cities to find areas of respite, rest,

¹⁴ Jon C. Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 48-71; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 263-95.

¹⁵ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 249-53; Adam Rome, "Coming to Terms with Pollution: The Language of Environmental Reform, 1865-1915," *Environmental History* 1.3 (1996): 6-28.

and relaxation as nineteenth-century doctors believed sufferers could best escape by traveling to designated areas with improved air quality. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the diagnoses of hay fever had moved across the country to Midwestern cities.¹⁶

Sufferers began establishing social organizations to give a voice to those afflicted. The United States Hay Fever Association, founded in 1873, met annually to discuss practical solutions. They collected data on where sufferers found the best relief from hay fever symptoms and produced publications providing medicinal remedies. These publications also served as travel guides for those looking for hay fever solutions, with Northern Michigan often noted as a haven of relief, particularly Harbor Springs. While the East Coast wealthy and elite traveled to the White Mountains of New Hampshire for vacation, those in Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee considered northern Michigan the Midwest's premier relief destination. Sufferers imagined a Michigan landscape that could heal the physical detriments associated with industrial society.¹⁷

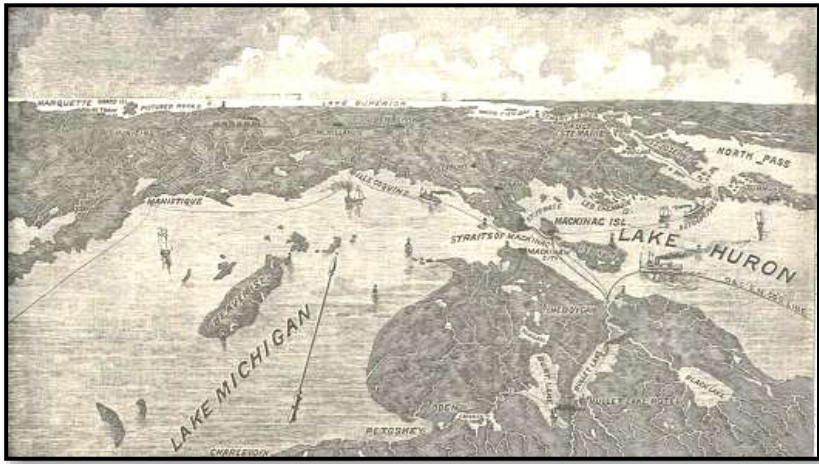
Another ailment was neurasthenia, a catchall term for a variety of urbanites' ailments that began to afflict the same wealthy Americans affected by hay fever. In 1884, Dr. George Miller Beard published his research on neurasthenia and announced that its primary cause was "modern civilization with its accompaniment," linking mental and physical health to the growth of cities and the advent of new technologies. Thus, neurasthenia became a mechanism to diagnose the anxieties of the modern world and the cultural unknowns large urban areas represented.¹⁸

Vacations could offer a break from that life. Beard noted how "trips that last for perhaps but two or three days, or even a single day, especially a change from city to country air, sometimes brings relief." Foul air, smoke, and fumes also represented an attack on the moral fibers of society. If the city thus symbolized the downside of the industrialized

¹⁶ Gregg Mitman, "Hay Fever Holiday: Health, Leisure, and Place in Gilded Age America," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 77.3 (2003): 600-35; Charles Harrison Blackley, *Hay Fever: Its Causes, Treatment, and Effective Prevention, Experimental Researches* (London: Baillière, Tindall & Cox, 1880).

¹⁷ *Report: Unites States Hay Fever Association* (New York: United States Hay Fever Association, 1913), 8.

¹⁸ George Miller Beard, *A Practical Treatise on the Treatment of Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia)* (New York: W. Wood & Co., 1880), vii; Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 86-88; Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009), 239-48.



“Map Straights of Mackinac,” *Midsummer Voyages on Northern Seas*, Detroit and Cleveland Steam Navigation Company (n.d.)

Source: Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University

world, then rural landscapes could be imagined as the healthy alternative.¹⁹ As a result, promoters were quick to claim that rural, non-industrial landscapes had therapeutic qualities.²⁰

Railroad and steamship companies, attempting to fill an economic void left by deforested landscapes, responded by rebranding northern Michigan landscapes. The same spaces transformed by axes were now advertised to suffering, wealthy urbanites, while the same infrastructure once built to transport extracted resources began to carry tourists. In 1876, the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company donated three hundred acres of land near Petoskey in the Little Traverse Bay to a Methodist group for religious and social purposes. This group, the Bay View Association, launched resort life in northern Michigan, re-configuring (and re-imagining) a stretch of coastline from a space of natural exploitation to one of restoring physical and emotional health.²¹

¹⁹ Beard, *A Practical Treatise*, 128; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

²⁰ Beard, *A Practical Treatise*, 186.

²¹ Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company, *Annual Report: 1875-1876* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company, 1877); John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts

The Association's leaders situated Bay View outside of Petoskey in an environment perceived as clean and comforting and able to foster spiritual renewal. Those who visited could fish, hunt, and attend a Chautauqua lecture series. The Bay View Association's idyllic recreational environment illustrated that vacationing up north could provide physical and mental purification.²² In 1884, the *Bay View Herald* declared "Bay View is specific for Hay Fever" and that "hundreds with testify to their entire freedom from this annual fever so long as they remain in their northern Home."

One Bay View president noted that the area offered "educational and religious advantages, to uplift and upbuild humanity" and in this way sufferers would return "physically, morally, intellectually and spiritually better fitted to cope with the problems of everyday life."²³ Those wealthy enough to become members of the Bay View Association partook in a variety of spiritually, mentally, or physically uplifting activities. Women could join reading groups while men and boys were encouraged to enjoy the many activities offered by the resort's Department of Recreation, such as swimming and sailing—opportunities unavailable or dangerous in the industrial cities further south.²⁴ Children were offered a plethora of opportunities including "The Field and Forest Club," where students experienced northern Michigan's nature first hand.²⁵ All of these activities contributed to what the directors of the Bay View Association described as the "indescribable charm of living near to nature's heart."²⁶ The shores

Press, 1989). Similar economic reinvention phenomena occurred in Wisconsin's cutover regions; Timothy Bawden, "Reinventing the Frontier: Tourism, Nature, and Environmental Change in Northern Wisconsin, 1880-1930," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2001), and "The Northwoods: Back to Nature," *Wisconsin Land and Life*, ed. Robert C. Ostergren and Thomas R. Vale (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 450-69.

²² Michigan Camp Ground Association, *Bay View Herald: Eight Michigan State Camp Meeting* (Grand Rapids: L.S. Dexter, 1864), 15.

²³ Bay View Camp Ground Association, *Annual Reports* (Bay View, Michigan: Bay View Association, 1919), 1.

²⁴ Bay View Association, "The Woman's Council" and "The Department of Recreation," *The Bay View Magazine*, June 1895, 10, and May 1911, 526. For a further investigation of women's activities of the Bay View Association see Kristin Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 153-208.

²⁵ Bay View Association, "Recreative Features," *The Bay View Magazine*, June 1894, 191.

²⁶ Bay View Association, "The Field and Forest Club," *The Bay View Magazine*, June 1894, 195.

of northern Lake Michigan represented a location of complete restoration for the members of the Bay View Association.

The Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad was but one company that promoted tourism in northern Michigan's vacationlands. The Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company touted Mackinac Island as a health resort for "sickly" city dwellers. Many pamphlets quoted physicians praising the excellence of vacationing on the island. One steamship pamphlet quoted "Dr. Hammond, the famous physician": "I have no hesitation in saying it is the best summer resort of which I have any knowledge for persons whose nervous systems are run down, or who desire to be built up and strengthened."²⁷ Steamship and railroad companies both clamored to proclaim northern Michigan as *the* premiere healing destination of the Great Lakes region. These advertisements needed to encourage thousands of Americans to travel hundreds of miles to experience something new, something that could not be found in the cities.²⁸

The Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company advertised that "Besides the agreeable climate on reaching Mackinac, there is the new sensation to one who has not before enjoyed the novelty of an insular life, of having found an island retreat . . . a bulwark of defense against the host of annoyances from which he has sought refuge." Lake Michigan and Lake Huron were described in almost transcendent ways, their natural qualities serving as fortifications from the modern world. For advertisers and tourists, the symbol of Mackinac Island meant more than a prospective tourist destination. It was a haven, and a retreat, from the anxieties people experienced in their daily lives.²⁹

New transportation lines increased the options for travelers. In Little Traverse Bay, rail lines were constructed from Petoskey to Harbor Springs, Bay View, and Wequetonsing. The connecting lines made access to individual resort communities far easier. By the end of the nineteenth century, a passenger arriving on a Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company steamer would see the shoreline landscape of Little Traverse Bay sprinkled with cottages, beaches, and small resort communities. The

²⁷ Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company, *D & C day and night trips Detroit and Cleveland* (Detroit: Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company, 1905).

²⁸ Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company, *Midsummer D & C Voyages* (Detroit: Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company, 1893); Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad, *Northern Michigan Lakes and Summer Resorts* (Chicago: Cameron, Amberg & Co., 1880), 50; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

²⁹ Detroit and Cleveland Steam Navigation Company, *Hunting and fishing resorts of the Great Lakes via picturesque Mackinac* (Buffalo: N.Y. Matthews & Northrup Co., 1887).



The Hero of Manila, Detroit and Cleveland Company (1900)

Source: Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University

act of travel, too, became its own revitalizing experience. Reading materials in cities and aboard the vessels helped prepare the traveler for the experiences they were sure to find aboard their steamships and eventually on shore.³⁰

In 1900, the Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company published a novel entitled *A Hero of Manila*. In it the Captain (unnamed in order for readers to better imagine themselves in the role) is a heroic figure, honorable both on and off the field of battle. Highly decorated, he is seemingly inviolable yet falls victim to the inhospitable climate of the jungle and contracts an unnamed “tropical fever.” He is sent back to America to heal but continues to battle the disease as his doctor struggles to find a cure, eventually concluding that he will mostly likely die from the illness within six months. Shocked by the doctor’s diagnosis, the Captain resolves to beat the ailment. When a distant aunt from northern Michigan visits the hero, she extolls the fresh airs of northern Michigan

³⁰ Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company, *Annual Report: 1880-1881* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company, 1882).

and convinces the Captain to head north (on a Detroit and Cleveland steamer, of course). The reader follows the Captain's progress through all the ports of the Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company's major vacation hubs: Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Alpena, Cheboygan, and Mackinac Island, where the novel culminates. The war hero is miraculously healed thanks to the clean air of the northern Great Lakes and the comforts found on a Detroit and Cleveland vessel. In a stunning conclusion, he is reunited with the love of his life and is married overlooking the shining blue waters.³¹

Publications like *A Hero of Manila* served as educational entertainment for passengers. The novel's pages were lined with advertisements of hay fever medicines, hotels, and local shops found in various towns along Lake Michigan and Lake Huron coastline. The experience of travel aided vacationers attempting to heal from the pressures of the city. Sleeping overnight on a steamer headed to Mackinac, a traveler was "undisturbed by racking dreams and hideous nightmares, brought by the thoughts of the city and its cares." All of these experiences continued to define the northern portions of Michigan, and the Upper Midwest more generally, as a destination of restoration.³²

In addition to those seeking cleaner air, the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company regularly advertised to fisherman and hunters alike. The company tagged itself the "fishing line" with one advertisement noting that "the brook trout, the most endeared member of the finny tribe to the heart of the angler, is found here in abundance and strings of speckled beauties reward fishermen for a day's labor in this vicinity." Hunting, advertised much like fishing, promised to connect urbanites to the "ancient" practice of hunting by collecting an abundance of deer, bear, small game, and pigeons.³³ By the end of the nineteenth century, the fishing that Henry Schoolcraft had dismissed in 1820 on the Ontonagon River had become a sought-out experience for tourists.

No matter their reason for traveling north, all vacationers were directed to iconic landmarks or specific activities at each individual destination as they exited their trains and steamers. For example, vacationers on Mackinac Island was encouraged to visit the Fort or Chimney Rock, while Sault Ste. Marie visitors were enticed to fish the St.

³¹ *A Hero of Manila* (Detroit: Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company, 1900).

³² Detroit and Cleveland Navigation Company, *D & C day and night trips*.

³³ *Summer resorts and waters of northern Michigan: reached via Grand Rapids & Indiana R.R., the Fishing Line* (Chicago: Poole Bros, 1885); *Petoskey: Queen City of the North* (Petoskey: Petoskey Record, 1908).

Marys River and watch boats pass through the Soo Canal. These recreational activities and scenic lookouts were much more than simple tourist attractions; they served as iconic landmarks, a visual representation of what the northern Michigan landscape *meant*.

At Little Traverse Bay, the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company regularly presented Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* with a paid cast of Ojibwe Indians; it became an iconic part of the area's tourist attractions. The play, and other activities, aimed to connect urbanites with a romanticized and primitive environment. One Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad pamphlet read:

Here at Yawaygamug, the native Ojibway Indian actors will give their play of 'Hiawatha' in the very place where Ojibway of the old days camped when it blew hard on the Great Lakes; here he could always get a deer, a bass, or a doré, a favorite food of his; here he had suitable soil and climate for his corn, beans, and potatoes; here grew the bark for his canoe covering, the cedar, and all the roots necessary for its construction; here his innate love for the beautiful was satisfied. . . . His self respect is immeasurably increased – increased commensurately with the respect shown by the white man for the Indian whom he sees transformed into a beautifully attired being . . . telling us of hygienic practices and exercises to which we must return if we would not become physically degenerate.³⁴

Despite the fact that Longfellow's epic poem was originally set near Lake Superior's Pictured Rocks, tourists did not object to a performance in Little Traverse Bay. The play offered much more than entertainment, as onlookers connected to the experiences of Indians and French Jesuits. The play concluded when Hiawatha set sail to the west (the romanticized frontier to onlookers) and told his village to heed the message of the black robes. Following the performance, spectators partook in activities such as fishing, canoeing, and swimming taught by local Native Americans from a reservation near Crooked Lake. The performance of *The Song of Hiawatha*, as well as the celebration of primitivism through hunting and fishing, allowed Anglo-Americans to experience what historian Philip

³⁴ *The Indian Play of Hiawatha at Ya-way-ga-mug near Petoskey, Michigan* (Grand Rapids: The Dean-Hicks Printing Co., 1905).

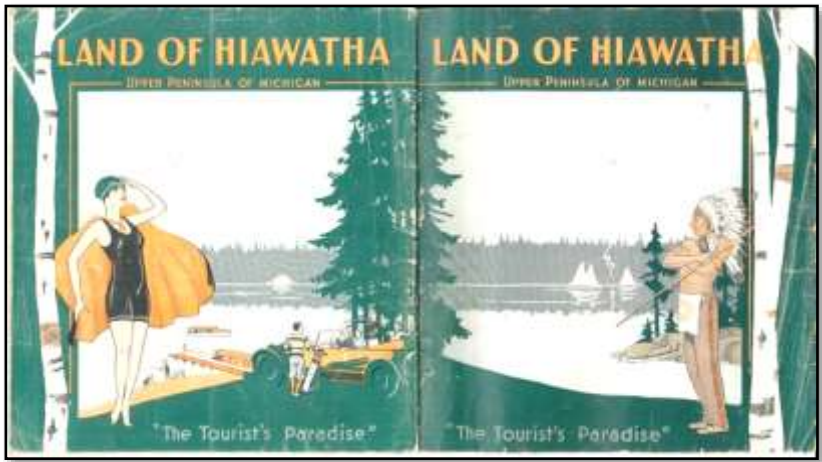
Deloria has defined as the cultural practice of “playing Indian.” The performances’ themes likely resonated with onlookers and symbolically cemented the Native actors in the past, propelling the imagined importance of Anglo-American presence for the future.³⁵

The advertisement’s metaphors successfully linked literature with landscape. For seasonal visitors, northern Michigan was viewed as more *natural* as well as more *primitive*. When copper mining dwindled in the early twentieth century, developers and promoters attempted to re-imagine Copper Country. After a brief attempt to rebrand the Upper Peninsula’s deforested landscapes as a dairy farm alternative, tourism boosters from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula called upon much of the same imagery found earlier in Little Traverse Bay advertisements to create a new, northern vacationland. Boosters dubbed the Upper Peninsula the “Land of Hiawatha.” Hunting lodges and National Forests used Native imagery to appeal to downstate tourists looking to find to a certain kind of camping experience.³⁶

By the end of the nineteenth century, both wealthy urbanites and advertisers had reimagined many of Michigan’s landscapes, along with other regions of the United States, as destinations that provided an environment beneficial to urban sufferers. Soon regions like Southern California, New Hampshire’s White Mountains, or several coastal villages in Maine would all be advertised as American oases, and all had regional pull for nearby urban areas. By 1900, Schoolcraft’s vision for Michigan as a landscape both industrialized and cultivated existed alongside these

³⁵ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 232-33; Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 95-127; Richard White, “Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill,” in *The Frontier in American Culture: An Exhibition at the Newberry Library, August 26, 1994-January 7, 1995* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 7-65; Alan Trachtenberg, *Shades of Hiawatha: Staging Indians, Making Americans, 1880-1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

³⁶ Aaron Shapiro, “Promoting Cloverland: Regional Associations, State Agencies, and the Creation of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula Tourist Industry,” *Michigan Historical Review* 29.1 (2003): 1-37, and *The Lure of the North Woods*, 43-72; Jim Kates, *Planning a Wilderness: Regenerating the Great Lakes Cutover Region* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 162; Allen Dyer Shaffmaster, *Hunting in the Land of Hiawatha* (Chicago: M. A. Donohue and Company, 1904). For farming history in the Upper Peninsula see The Upper Peninsula Development Bureau, “The JM Longyear Plan for Bringing Highest Type of Farmers to Clover-Land,” *Clover-Land* (Menominee, MI), January 1916; Terry S. Reynolds, “‘Quite an Experiment’: A Mining Company Attempts to Promote Agriculture on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, 1895-1915,” *Agricultural History* 80.1 (2006): 64-98.



“The Tourist’s Paradise,” *Land of Hiawatha: Upper Peninsula of Michigan*, Upper Peninsula Development Bureau (1929)

Source: Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University

tourist ideals championed by wealthier members of society.³⁷ Yet as tourists sought to protect their specific needs and wants, *their* imagined landscapes threatened the industrial landscapes of northern Michigan.

Hunting and fishing associations, aided by the celebration of primitivism, introduced the first conservation laws. These groups of mostly white men led the way in legislating protections for wildlife and the landscapes they inhabited. By 1887, Michigan had legislated the creation of the state game warden, who could enforce a new wave of environmental protection for fish and fowl considered desirable to the sportsman. As conservation caught on (too late for the Grayling fish and Passenger Pigeon) large tracts of forest were restored largely through the efforts of young men and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Game laws were enacted to represent the desires of wealthy men seeking to ritualize acts of hunting and fishing. Schoolcraft’s dream of cultivation was

³⁷ Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1- 51; Richard W. Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 197- 228.

abandoned for a new and imagined vision of the “primitive.” But not all groups benefitted from this shift in environmental perspective.³⁸

Conservationists’ efforts diminished the voices of those who did not share their plans for Michigan’s northern landscapes. By relegating Native Americans to the past, Anglo-Americans were able to forge a collective identity centered on progress. The symbol of the Native thus helped develop identity among Anglo-Americans while effectively silencing the voices of these earliest inhabitants. Likewise, this narrative of progress made it possible for game and fish wardens to simply ignore earlier treaty negotiations that protected Native fishing rights under the veil of environmental conservation. Officers often destroyed Ojibwe and Odawa fishing equipment if the groups lacked the official documentation required of fishing companies. The political, social, and environmental landscape at the dawn of the twentieth century scarcely resembled what Schoolcraft had described in 1820. Some of Michigan’s landscapes were scarred by industrialization, pastoralized through cultivation, and reforested through conservation. Behind those landscapes were the actions, laws, and biases that all worked to imprint new meanings onto the environment.³⁹

Fueled by a growing middle class, the advent of paid vacations, and an increase in transportation options, tourism in northern Michigan continued to increase throughout the twentieth century. Vacationing opportunities expanded beyond the Lower Peninsula and soon Michigan’s Upper Peninsula was spotted with campsites and tourist destinations. Harnessing similar language as the nineteenth-century boosters, tourism promoters throughout all of northern Michigan proclaimed the restorative attributes of a vacation in the North.⁴⁰ The rise of cabins, low-cost campgrounds, and state parks made vacationing in northern Michigan accessible and affordable. In doing so, a wider portion of society began to see these landscapes as a much-needed counterpart to the stressful realities of the modern world.

³⁸ Dave Dempsey, *Ruin and Recovery: Michigan’s Rise as a Conservation Leader* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 19-48.

³⁹ James Joseph Buss, *Winning the West with Words: Language and Conquest in the Lower Great Lakes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 165-211; Margaret Beattie Bogue, *Fishing the Great Lakes: An Environmental History, 1781-1933* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 74-82; Michael J. Chiarappa and Kristin M. Szylian, *Fish for All: An Oral History of Multiple Claims and Divided Sentiment on Lake Michigan* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2003), 1-99.

⁴⁰ Shapiro, *The Lure of the North Woods*, 74.

The earliest tourism advertisements that had defined northern Michigan's environment as *the* natural landscape of the Great Lakes region instilled a certain environmental expectation in the hearts and minds of many Michiganders that remained throughout the twentieth century. In the midst of the 1960s environmental movement, politicians targeted northern portions of the state with a wave of environmental legislation. Many of Michigan's residents had placed so much cultural importance on the perception of pristine northern Michigan landscapes that they intended to legislate its permanence. Politicians and residents alike rallied to protect Michigan's natural spaces. Verna Mize, born and raised in Houghton, Michigan, led a long and successful battle against the Reserve Mining Company in northern Minnesota for dumping 16,000 tons of asbestos-based tailings per day into the Lake Superior basin. As a key founder of the Save the Lake Superior Association, her goal was to protect the natural landscape that supported the Keweenaw Peninsula's tourist economy at the expense of mining interests. "The economy of upper peninsula of Michigan and the greater parts of Minnesota and Wisconsin depend on tourism," she argued. "If Lake Superior were to be polluted, tourists would not go up there." Mize drew her need to protect Lake Superior from a deep passion for the aesthetics of the region but also from the benefits of the tourism economy. Her efforts brought national attention to the issue. In 1980, after a long legal battle, the Reserve Mining Company halted their dumping practices into Lake Superior. Mize's environmentalism, shaped by a tourist ethic, earned herself the celebratory title "First Lady of Lake Superior."⁴¹

The tourist ethic alongside the emerging modern environmental movement helped encourage environmental legislation—much of it framed in defense of a tourism-based economy. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the Michigan Environmental Protection Act, the Great Lakes Shore Lands Management Act, the Scenic and Wild Rivers Act, the Wilderness Act, the Inland Lakes and Streams Act, and the Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Act were just a few pieces of legislation introduced to

⁴¹ *Interview With Verna Mize by Lloyd Schwartz for WJR*, 20 July 1971, Verna Grahek Mize: Save Lake Superior Collection, MS-134, Box 2, Folder 53, Michigan Tech Archives & Copper Country Historical Collections (hereafter Verna Mize collection); Environmental Protection Agency, *Studies Regarding the Effect of the Reserve Mining Company Discharge on Lake Superior, May 2, 1973*, US Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Enforcement and General Counsel, Washington, DC, 20460, MS-134, Box 6, Folder 26, Verna Mize collection; Neal R. Pierce, *The Great Plains States of America: People, Politics, and Power in Nine Great Plains States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973), 127-29.

maintain and protect Michigan's landscapes. This tourism ideal did not sit well with all, however. Dominic Jacobetti, State Representative from Marquette, Michigan, saw environmental legislation as a series of job-killers hurting an already struggling iron-mining industry. Many politicians, including Jacobetti, believed the new wave of environmentalism was detrimental to Michigan's economy. So when lawmakers, such as Senator Phil Hart, proposed the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Jacobetti protested, arguing that "the rural areas of the Upper Peninsula have become even more wilderness and more available for recreational use." Jacobetti continued to inform legislators that "in 1960, there were 5,251 operating farms in the 15 counties of the Upper Peninsula. In 1970, the number of farms had fallen drastically to 2,700 an almost 50% decrease." Ultimately, he declared, "the Upper Peninsula farming areas are reverting automatically to the wilderness concept." Jacobetti was not alone in imagining a productive Michigan landscape, not a wild one.⁴²

Jacobetti concerned himself with the economic condition of his constituents. Environmentalists' moves to create National Lakeshores, as he saw it, were environmentally unnecessary. He actively fought off the perception of Michigan's Upper Peninsula as solely a recreational landscape. The increased environmental legislation (along with the simultaneous decrease in iron ore production) was the main reason why he proposed that the Upper Peninsula separate from the Lower Peninsula to become its own state. Jacobetti insisted that this new 51st state would be an environment safe from the wilderness concept many tourists hoped to legislate. His voice demonstrated yet another complexity to the modern perception of the environments of Michigan as an idyllic landscape.⁴³

Whereas wealthy urbanites of the nineteenth century sought specific places such as Harbor Springs and Mackinac Island, today's tourists simply wish to "head north." Helped by the successful images from the

⁴² Transcript of Dominic Jacobetti at the Senate Hearing on House Bill 4881-The Wilderness Bill, March 1, 1972, Lansing, Michigan, MSS-78, 52/16, 11-01-02-02, Dominic Jacobetti Papers, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, Northern Michigan University (hereafter Jacobetti papers).

⁴³ Speech by Ken Dorman before the Lansing-Waverly Rotary Luncheon, 9 October 1979, MSS-78, 58/30, 10-02-02-02, Jacobetti Papers; "State of Superior Proposal," 1976, Response by Citizens to Save the Superior Shoreline, MSS-011, 6/1, 34-07-29, Citizens to Save the Superior Shoreline Records, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, Northern Michigan University; Brian C. Kalt, *Sixties Sandstorm: The Fight Over Establishment of a Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, 1960-1970* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001); Shapiro, *The Lure of the North Woods*, 191-217.

“Pure Michigan” advertising campaign, the forests, rivers, lakes, and tourist towns of the old cut-over areas continue to draw travelers. Interestingly, there is no one town, city, or latitudinal line that defines a transition into the “North Country.” Instead, the imagined environment grew into a cultural and environmental ideal often referred to by residents simply as “Up North.” Since the late-nineteenth century, advertisers and tourists advocated for an imagined landscape that, in turn, has been cemented into a larger collective identity and environmental ethic shared by many contemporary Michiganders.

In one way, today’s “Pure Michigan” campaign is not very different than those produced over one hundred years earlier by the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company. Both advertisers asked onlookers to imagine the potential health benefits of visiting these unique environments. The appeal of a Pure Michigan commercial says as much about consumers as it does the environment itself, maybe more. Does the implication of untouched, untrammled, and pristine natures have the potential to overwrite the realities of past residents? Native Americans, French, British, American industrialists, tourists, and environmentalists all saw different meaning in the same landscapes, so what is lost when accepting the message of an untouched, or pure, Michigan?

The truth is that Henry Schoolcraft would not recognize today’s Michigan. He may be disappointed to see that the northern forests have not been turned into farmland. He might be confused by the recreational value tourists place on climbing up Sleeping Bear and Grand Sable Dunes, places he described as “desolate” and “bleak.” And Schoolcraft may feel estranged surrounded by the Disney-esque buildings of Mackinac Island, where souvenir stores and fudge shops now line the streets he once walked as Indian-Agent. Although many visitors believe these places represent *living-history*, they are more a reflection of a constructed present than of a more natural, or untouched, past.⁴⁴

Environmental imaginations are seen in both the actions of tourists and the efforts of advertisers to define Michigan’s landscapes in ways that solved larger cultural concerns. Like those past imaginaries, the landscapes of Michigan will continue to reflect the larger cultural concerns of those attempting to define them through their words, actions, and environmental practices. Although tourists want to experience the unspoiled natures of Michigan, no such environment exists. One need only to search for one of the few remaining stands of virgin white pine to

⁴⁴ Schoolcraft, *Narrative Journal of Travels*, 104.

partially understand today's departure from earlier natures. "That's what landscapes do when we look deeply," historian Jared Farmer has stated bluntly. "They haunt us. They remind us that the past – as inscribed in our present landscape – is a record of tragedy, hope, considerable irony."⁴⁵ Michigan's environmental histories have the unsettling tendency to make us think about the realities of environmental change and the human motives behind them. Landscapes are artifacts of that history.

⁴⁵ Jared Farmer, "This Was the Place: Making and Unmaking of Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 82.3 (2014): 193.