

MY MARQUETTE

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Explore the Queen City of the North,
Its History, People, and Places
With Native Son

Tyler R. Tichelaar
Author of *The Marquette Trilogy*

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Marquette Fiction

1202 Pine Street

Marquette, MI 49855

www.MarquetteFiction.com

ISBN: 9780979179051

Print coordination:

Globe Printing, Inc. Ishpeming, MI

www.globeprinting.net

Interior layout & design: Larry Alexander

Cover Design: Victor Volkman

Front Cover photographs: Ann Gonyea and Sonny Longtine

Back cover photograph: Evelyn Bendick

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To the Great-Aunts and Great-Uncles
Kit, Jack, Jolly, Vi, Barb, Sadie, Ione, and Frank
&
To All Those Who Love Marquette

“Wasn’t I lucky to be born in my favorite city?”
— Tootie in the film *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944)

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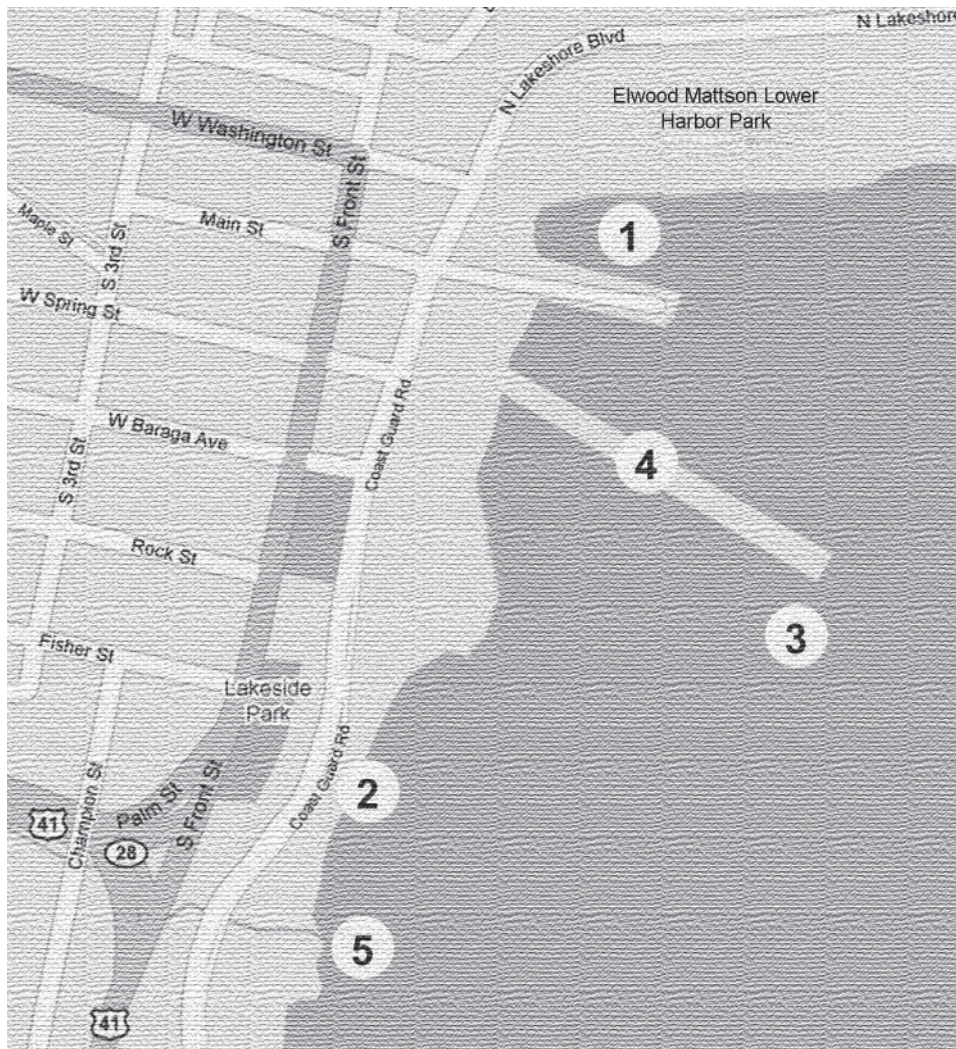
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PART I: IN THE BEGINNING ON IRON BAY



1. The Lower Harbor
2. Founders Landing
3. Ripley's Rock
4. Ore Docks
5. Gaines Rock & The Northwestern Hotel

THE LOWER HARBOR

“Clara, there it is!” Gerald exclaimed. She turned in the direction he pointed as he came and linked his arm in hers. She dimly made out a few logs floating in the water; in another minute, they were discernible as a small dock. Then between the trees a couple wooden structures became visible.

“There’s Worcester,” said Mr. Harlow, joining them on deck.

— Iron Pioneers

My first published novel, *Iron Pioneers*, begins with the arrival in Marquette—then known as the village of Worcester—of Clara and Gerald Henning. We first see the rugged wilderness settlement through Clara’s eyes as she approaches the harbor on a schooner in the summer of 1849.

The town had been established as a harbor where iron ore could be shipped out of Upper



Marquette from Mattson Park ~ Lower Harbor

Michigan on the Great Lakes to such industrial centers as Buffalo and Pittsburgh and even to Canada. Iron ore had been discovered in 1844, just west in the area that would become the cities of Negaunee and Ishpeming, so the ore was carried from the mines to Marquette to be shipped. During those early years, the ships that came in and out of the harbor were Marquette’s only link to civilization, and during winter, with Lake Superior mostly frozen and travel on it impossible, Marquette was isolated, no hope of contact with the outside world existing unless one wished to snowshoe or take a dogsled hundreds of miles to Green Bay or Milwaukee.

In the years that followed, the harbor would grow into a major shipping port for iron ore, lumber, and fish. By the early twentieth century, the harbor would contain five large docks. (The productivity and demand for iron ore even resulted in another dock being built in North Marquette near Presque Isle Park, resulting in it being known as the Upper Harbor, while Iron Bay's harbor became the Lower Harbor.) The shipping season from the Lower Harbor was usually mid-April to late November, although in mild winters, ships ran until late December. By the start of the twentieth century, ships from across the Great Lakes would fill the Lower Harbor. Even passenger ships arrived, carrying tourists who came to enjoy Marquette's reputedly healthy climate and cool summer temperatures.

From 1925 to 1976, the Spear's Coal Dock flourished at the harbor's north end where coal was delivered by ship and then delivered to the city's power plants to keep Marquette's homes warm during long winters. Then once the Presque Isle Power Plant at the harbor's south end was built, the Spear's dock went out of business.

As the twentieth century waned and many of the old mines closed, the ore docks became less needed and eventually were torn down. Today, only one dock remains, no longer connected to the railroad, almost all traces of which are gone. Instead, the harbor has transformed itself into a recreational center for Marquette.

In the 1980s, Mattson Park was created after the Spear's Coal Dock was removed and the area cleaned up. Today, the park is central to Marquette's summer activities, being host to many festivals including the International Food Fest, the Seafood Fest, and the Blues Fest. It includes a large children's playground and a marina. At its far end is the Lake Superior Theatre, a boathouse belonging to the Frazier family that is annually turned into a summer theatre; several plays are performed there every season and at least one always in some way commemorates Upper Michigan history and the proud heritage derived from the early settlers.

Clara and Gerald Henning would scarcely recognize the harbor today. No bands play to greet incoming ships as they once did. Few sea vessels other than yachts and the occasional tourist cruise ship enter the harbor. While Iron Bay's appearance has changed, it remains a central part of Marquette residents' lives, and the recent establishment of "Founders Landing" shows that the city's early settlers are far from forgotten.

FOUNDERS LANDING

As she stepped out of the wooden hut, she scanned the other log cabins under construction. A few wigwams and a lodge house were in the distance; she wondered whether Indians resided in them or had white men taken possession. Scarcely enough buildings existed to qualify as a village. She looked down to the lake where the lone dock stood. The schooner had already disappeared from sight, leaving no chance to escape. Lake Superior stood before her—the only source of communication with the outside world—so large she could not see Canada across it. How long before another ship would come, before ships would come regularly?

— Iron Pioneers

Today, the area known as Founders Landing along the south end of Iron Bay is being reclaimed by Marquette’s residents to honor the city’s heritage. For years, this area was industrialized and belonged to the railroads, but in recent years, it was purchased with the intention to turn it into a historic park. Various ethnic and historical monuments as well as condominiums and a hotel are slated to be erected in the area.

The name, Founders Landing, was chosen because at this spot on May 18, 1849, Robert Graveraet and Peter White first arrived by rowboat with a few hired workers to establish the town. They were greeted by Charles Kawbawgam, last Chief of the



**Reenactment of Peter White & Robert Graveraet Landing
on May 18, 1849**

Chippewa Indians, and they were even invited to live in his lodgehouse while they built their own homes. Soon after, the Harlow family arrived—Amos Harlow having technically been commissioned to establish the community, and hence, he became known as the founder of Marquette.

In 2009, on the 160th anniversary of White and Graveraet's arrival, the first event was held at the new Founders Landing. I was among the forty or so hardy people who gathered there at six in the morning to see a rowboat appear in the harbor just after sunrise with local citizens playing the roles of Peter White, Robert Graveraet, and the Native Americans who greeted them. The event was organized by Frida Waara and former Marquette mayor, Jerry Irby. A proclamation from Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm was read which officially established May 18th as Founders Day for Marquette.

Those who have left Marquette and now return years later are impressed by how the lakeshore has been reclaimed from its industrial past and transformed into a new waterfront park. Founders Landing stands as a testament to good planning in Marquette and the community's appreciation for the lake and a desire to keep the waterfront accessible to everyone.

Peter White and Robert Graveraet would doubtless be happy to see the spot where they first landed so appreciated still today.

RIPLEY'S ROCK

Then on Christmas Day, on the distant horizon, a sail was spotted by a Worcester man. A holler went up. People gathered to look. Cheers rang out. Every man, woman and child in the village rushed to the shore, the ship clearly in view. In came the Siscowit, in it came to Iron Bay! Safe again were the courageous mariners; saved was the settlement of Worcester! The schooner docked at Ripley's Rock, its brave men, their bodies frozen, forgot the cold as they were warmly hailed as heroes. The village burst with good will as each person helped to unload the supplies and praise the men who had saved them all. This Christmas was the finest any of them had ever known. This Christmas was the one they would remember when all others were forgotten. This moment had been the most vital in the village's history. Not a single heart failed to give thanks that day. Worcester would survive through this winter, to face many more winters to come.

— Iron Pioneers

In the middle of Iron Bay is Ripley's Rock, a rocky little island named for Calvin Ripley, captain of the *Fur Trader*. In the fall of 1848, nearly a year before Marquette was founded, Captain Ripley came into Iron Bay with a heavy cargo as a terrible storm raged. Rather than let the *Fur Trader* crash against the rock, Ripley managed to come around the lee of the little island and hook his schooner to it. He then staunchly waited out the storm for three days. The rock has been known as Ripley's Rock ever since.

The above passage from *Iron Pioneers* describes the first winter in Marquette when the settlers waited for a supply ship to arrive that was so late



Ripley's Rock

in coming, they feared starvation. The ship, the *Siscowit*, was stranded in the ice in the harbor of the little village of L'Anse, some seventy miles away by land, but once the residents of Marquette (then named Worcester) learned where it was, they bravely found men to sail it across Lake Superior to Marquette. After forcing their way through a terrible blizzard of ice and snow that made the schooner's deck into a skating rink, the *Siscowit* arrived in Iron Bay and moored at Ripley's Rock—there being no dock at the time.

It was not uncommon in Marquette's early years for schooners to dock at Ripley's Rock, and then for smaller boats to go out to bring in the supplies. Livestock was usually unloaded directly into the water and made to swim to shore.

In the late 1860s, a band shell was built on Ripley's Rock, and the Marquette Union Band played concerts for the townspeople from there. Later, a dance pavilion was built and a small narrow dock constructed in 1888 from the shore out to the rock. A Civil War cannon was also installed to celebrate the Fourth of July, but it is believed vandals pushed it into the lake where it apparently remains today.

Today the rock is vacant save for the seagulls, but it is a familiar sight to all Marquette residents.