

THE BAY CITY TIMES

The point is history for developer on Tawas'es' sandy spit

Thursday, December 07, 2006



The Ohio developer who is building The Cottages at Tawas Point condominiums is completing what nobody else would do. Larry LaPointe, with the help of his daughter Lisa LaPointe, is preserving the maritime history of the Tawas. Bravo!

When LaPointe bought 371 feet of waterfront property last year, there were fears that the former home of the local U.S. Coast Guard station would fall to the wrecking ball. The developer, it turns out, appears more interested in local history than the local folks. He offered the old structure, built in 1876 for the U.S. Lifesaving Service, to any preservation group that would have it. Sadly, none came forward. So LaPointe is spending \$500,000 to restore the place on that sandy shore. He'll use it as his own home.

The historic structure is saved. Complete with a lookout room atop the roof, a widow's walk and red-and-white paint, it'll look as it did around the turn of the last century.

Local landmarks are worth saving. Just look at the Tawas Point Lighthouse. What would the point be without it, and the state's restoration of that historic beacon? Why, it would be just like the waterfront down in the towns of Tawas City and East Tawas.

There, the citizens uttered few words of protest before wrecking balls this fall crumbled the former city hall, called the Greystone Building, and that marvelous, old curiosity, the Detroit & Mackinac Railway roundhouse. We'll never see their likes again. Not everything that is old is worth saving. But landmarks such as these surely were.

Thanks to the LaPointe family, one of the few remaining reminders of a bygone era on that wild, windswept spit of sand called Tawas Point will remain. If the community can't - or won't - save these structures, it at least owes those who do its heartfelt thanks.

Thank you, LaPointe's. You are a welcome and valuable addition to Northeast Michigan.



Landmark gets new life as house

by Jason Ogden

EAST TAWAS - In the wake of the recent demolition of two historic buildings in the Tawas, one building, constructed in 1876, is actively being restored. A part of the old Tawas Point Coast Guard Station, which was bought by Larry LaPointe for the construction of the Cottages of Tawas Point development, is being restored as a private residence.

Tony Jordan, owner of Tony Jordan Contracting service, said that it is a common misconception that the entire station building was torn down. Jordan, a National City resident who has been working on renovating the structure, said, when the

station was being torn down, the original Coast Guard Life Saving Station was intact. In essence, a building inside of a building was discovered.

“When we first bought the project, we didn’t have any intention of restoring the building,” said Lisa LaPointe, the daughter of Larry LaPointe. LaPointe said that the structure was offered to many different individuals and organizations in hopes that it would be restored to its period state. She said that her father even went so far as to offer to build a foundation and move the building.

In the end, Larry LaPointe opted to refurbish the structure - with the outside appearing just as it did in 1876 and the inside a modern two bedroom household - for around \$500,000. The building was even moved 200 feet from its original location. “The outside is very period,” said LaPointe, referring to the mortised and tenoned beams that jut from around the structure. Jordan said that some of these pieces had to be recreated where the larger addition to the station was added on to the structure.

Lisa LaPointe said that her father is still not sure what is going to be done with the structure when it is completed. She said that her father was willing to take the plunge and invest in the building, because sometimes history has to be preserved by private citizens. LaPointe said that the project has been followed by misinformation, like a rumor that the project was being funded by a federal grant.

Jordan said that most people believe that the station was entirely razed and have no idea that LaPointe is breathing new life into the building. Jordan, who has experience working with 300-year-old New England houses, said he has had a few surprises from the previous occupants of the life saving station. He said that his crew has found planks with the original construction workers’ names on them. Jordan said that one was dated Aug. 2, 1876, the year the life saving station, as well as the Tawas Point Lighthouse, was built. He has also found a small hat, buttons and a large metal needle, presumably used to sew together sails for Great Lakes vessels, said Jordan. Jordan speculated that, because it was a military installation, it was most likely kept spotless, which would explain the lack of artifacts. Jordan also speculated that, when the structure was built, the wood work wasn’t done on site, but shaped and created locally and brought in.

Perhaps one of the more unique aspects of the life saving station/new home is the lookout tower on top of the two-story structure. LaPointe said it would be a good place to just have some quiet time looking out over Lake Huron or, as Jordan said, have a few drinks with friends.

LaPointe said that her father is impressed with the progress of the building, which she once considered a wreck. “My dad told me he was going to save it and I said ‘Good Lord dad!’” she said.

Jordan, with his professional experience as a contractor, said the building was

surprisingly intact for its age. “The lifeguard station is gone as we knew it,” said Jordan, “but the life saving station is still here.”

September 9th, 2005

Pictured below is what is left of the 1875 Tawas Life Saving Station. The 1930's addition was removed off of the site and the original 1875 structure moved onto a new foundation. The old station has become part of the new development on the lot, which was once station property



These pictures were all taken on September 9th, 2005. You can see the house on its new foundation and some of the siding removed.



Here is a photo from the road showing the 11 adjoining units under construction.



August 9th, 2005

The original station has been moved to the north end of the property and sits on a new foundation now. A new roof had to be installed which required the detailed supports to be fabricated and put in place, based upon architectural drawings provided by the Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy.

May 2nd, 2005

TAWAS LIFE SAVING STATION TO BE SAVED!

It was announced today that the old Tawas Life Saving Station will be saved as part of the land development going on at Tawas Point. The Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy has agreed to provide the developer with a set of original architectural plans of the station, original specifications from 1875 and a copy of all of the historical photos on file so he may use them in brining the building back to as original condition as possible with some minor changes to make it more usable for modern living on the inside and some minor work on the outside.

The station is going to be moved from its original location to a new one, but on the same original government lot and on the water still. This keeps it in a much more historic setting than being out in the woods on another lot.

Currently the 1935 addition has been removed from the building and the original 1875 portion is still standing. The additions basement has not been completely removed and filled in yet. Many of the original interior wooden tongue and groove walls, ceilings and floors had all been preserved under a couple layers of drywall, carpet and was mostly all intact.

Below are some recent photos of the construction taking place. These photos were taken on May 4th, 2005.



Note all of the original architecture is under the new siding. It was cut approximately two feet up from the foundation, probably because of rotting wood over time. Shown is the North East corner facing the water. The boat house doors would have been on the left side of the photo. Note the bottom of the diamond shaped features typical of this station type.



Shown here is the side facing the water. The boat house doors would have been where the window and door are now.



This is the side where the Coast Guard put the 1935 addition on the side to expand the station. It has been tentatively sealed up to keep the elements out.



The garage, small shed and second boat house stood in this location on the left side of the photo, but have since been torn down the week of May 2nd, 2005.



A front view with the addition removed and dirt being brought in to fill the old basement that was dug out.



This is a sign that marks the entrance to the area of the old station. A lot of Coast Guard family housing was in the immediate area, some former Coast Guard people still live there to this day. Since the station will not be torn down, this sign will remain true to the area it represents.

September 20, 2004

PRESS RELEASE to Michigan Newspapers below. *Station Tawas as it sits today pictured below.*



Congress created the U.S. Life Saving Service in 1871 which is the forerunner to today's U.S. Coast Guard. Recognizing Michigan's treacherous coastline in 1875 a station was built at what was known as Ottawa Point on Lake Huron or today is known as Tawas Point. The station contains a boat-house, garage, shed and the station house. Just down the shoreline on the same point of land that extends out into the lake, another structure was built to aid the mariner in navigating the coast, which is the Tawas Point lighthouse.

The Life Saving Service during its official life of 44 years, before becoming part of the U. S. Coast Guard in 1915, was credited with going to the aid of over 178,000 persons in peril on the water. Not many people know about the Life Saving Service and its history. The motto of the service was "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back" and they lived by this motto with many men sacrificing their lives to rescue those in distress.

The station had an addition put on in 1935. Today, the original 1875 Type station still exists under those modifications and is in dire trouble of being lost forever if something isn't done to save the building from being destroyed if they are not relocated or dismantled. The station is nearing the end of its days because of lakefront development like so many other stations, which have been torn down. Michigan alone has lost most of these old stations and very few are left to tell this part of history.



The land that the Tawas Life Saving Station was built on was loaned to the government as long as they used it for life saving purposes. The U.S. Coast Guard expanded over the years and eventually a new modern station was built on the opposite side of the point. A unique problem with the Tawas station was the fate of the station based on the landowner loan. The Coast Guard, once they stopped using the old station gave the land back to the relatives of the man who made the agreement with them back in the 1800's as required. The buildings received no historical preservation covenant on them. The relatives who received the station back decided to sell the property.

The Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy (MLC), a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization whose goal is to help save threatened lighthouses and life saving stations in Michigan tried to get the entire property donated for preservation which did not occur.

The station is one of only sixteen such structures built around the United States under architect Francis W. Chandler's design, and only one of five still standing today. Very few original Life Saving Service stations remain in Michigan today.



It is hoped to restore the station back to this picture below.



June 30th, 2004

The former US Life Saving/US Coast Guard Station located in Tawas, Michigan is up for sale. The asking price has been reduced from \$750,000 to \$500,000. The Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy (MLC) is interested in saving this property from the demolition block. The property has no historic preservation covenants on it. It is one of only a very few 1876 stick style life saving station architectural styles left in Michigan and throughout the country. The site comes as is and is available to be demolished or whatever anyone wants to do with it..

As of June 7th, 2004, an offer has been made and accepted by a prospective buyer. The real estate agent working with the buyer has received a quote on bulldozing the building down after they take possession of the property.

The station has 350 foot of lake frontage. It is in a family trust right now. All heating, septic, appliances, etc. are intact and in working condition. The Michigan Lighthouse Conservancy will try and acquire the property for our nonprofit, but it sounds like highest bidder will acquire it. The history behind the station is that a guy named Small, back in the late 1800's told the life saving service they could build a station on his land and use it for as long as they saw fit. If it ever stopped being used for life saving purposes, then it would revert back to the family. Well, it is now in the family hands and they are selling it.

HISTORY OF U. S. COAST GUARD TAWAS STATION

From the [Iosco County Historical Museum](#) Archives
(written while new station was being constructed)

Station Tawas is located 3 miles NE of US 23 on Lakeview Dr. on 2.3 acres. Station was built in 1876 and expanded in 1936. It has been modified several times since it was first built. The over-water boathouse was built in 1939 on the bay side of the point, and was equipped with manual hoist capable of housing a 36 foot motor life boat (MLB) and is 1/2 Mile from the station on 5.9 acres of Coast Guard property. This boathouse is the fourth boathouse. The original boathouse was located at the main building and is the recreation area (Rec Deck) today. The second was the shops at the station and the third was on the bay side. It was built in 1910 and was replaced by the current structure in 1919. The station is the oldest in the District, and the only surviving example of the first series of life saving stations on the Great Lakes.

The stations area of responsibility includes 3611 square miles, the largest area assigned to any single station in the district. The station is busy with 140-160 cases annually from 15 May to 15 Sept. The boats assigned to the station are a 44 foot motor lifeboat, a 22 foot utility boat, and a 14 foot ice skiff. The crew at present consists of 17 men and women with a Boatswain Mate Chief (E-7) as officer in charge. The old 44 foot motor life boat has now been replaced by a new 47 foot motor life boat.

Station Tawas was first called Ottawa Point. The name was changed on July 1, 1902. The station was also nicknamed Near Light Lake Huron. The first keeper of the station was George Haskin and the latest keeper is BMC Robert H. Moore. The new station is being built on 5.9 acres and the property is located by the present boat house. The new station is a modern flat century station. This new station will cut down on the response time to get to the boat, warm the boat and getting it underway. The new station will be able to take care of many missions including, but not limited to Law Enforcement, Marine Safety Support and Search and Rescue, making it a true multi-mission station.



