



## MISSION POINT MACKINAC ISLAND

### **A Brief History of Mission Point**

#### **Early Days of The Mission**

After hundreds of years as a meeting place and home to a variety of local Native American tribes, the area now known as Mission Point on Mackinac Island was first visited by French missionaries in 1634. Several decades after Europeans were introduced to the east end of the island by local tribes, the first religious missions were established on Mackinac Island, with the first birchbark chapel constructed in 1670.

Following a century of territorial disputes and changeovers between the British and French, during which the Mackinac mission was moved to various locations on the mainland, a mission was permanently established on the island in 1780. In 1825, construction of the Mission House was completed, and the multi-story structure flourished as the center of a community, complete with a residential boarding school, chapel and enjoyed its reputation as a peaceful place for local tribes to meet with traveling traders and each other. From this period on, the east point of the island became known as Mission Point.

#### **From Outpost to International Retreat Destination**

From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1930s, the Mission District grew to include a thriving community of homes and cottages, and was home to several lodging houses, including the Mission House Hotel, which opened in the original Mission House building in 1849. Visitors began flocking to the island as a summer resort in the late 1800s, and the Mission House Hotel served as one of the island's original vacation destinations.

In the early 1940s, several groups began hosting a growing number of religious retreats in the buildings and cottages at Mission Point, leading to the establishment in the 1950s of a permanent international retreat center. Attracting visitors from around the globe, including prominent leaders and heads of state, development of the property increased in size and scope, leading to the construction of state-of-the-art performance spaces, premium guest rooms, and a campus designed for comfort, calm and fellowship among visitors. Many of the amenities created during this period still exist today, updated and upgraded to enhance the Mission Point experience.

#### **Mackinac College – Best in Class**

During the late 1960s, Mackinac University was created at Mission Point as a private liberal arts college, admitting 113 students to its first (and only) four-year class, lasting from 1966 to 1970. Existing buildings were deeded to the college, and a modern-style library building was constructed on what is now the Great Lawn. Though the college's home reverted to recreational lodging and retreat facilities after the sole graduating class received their diplomas in 1970, the memory of Mackinac College lives on to this day in regular class reunions, which remain well-attended and enthusiastically celebrated by the returning graduates, hosted every four years at Mission Point Resort.



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### **The Transition from Retreat to Resort**

Starting in the mid-1970s, the various buildings and facilities at Mission Point changed hands and purposes a number of times, shifting between retreat center to tourist attraction, back to part-time college, and even as a sound stage for broadcast and film performances. For the 1979 film “Somewhere in Time,” starring Jane Seymour, Christopher Plummer and Christopher Reeve, massive sets were erected on the Mission Point grounds, and the indoor sound stages originally created for filming song, dance and drama performances by retreat participants were used for principal filming, with many cast and crewmembers staying at what was then the Inns of Mackinac.

However, despite multiple attempts over the years to establish and maintain a viable hotel at Mission Point, the demands of upkeep and constant care required to sustain a successful business led to a series of changing owners and unfinished plans, lasting until the arrival of John Shufelt.

### **An Institution is Born – Mission Point Resort, Est. 1987**

Upon acquiring the property and buildings at the east end of the Mission Point in 1987, John Shufelt immediately became a local hero by demolishing the rapidly declining Mackinac College library building, uniting the verdant, four-acre expanse of the Great Lawn, as well as reclaiming the Great Lawn’s status as one of Mackinac Island’s most memorable destinations by adding the now-iconic Adirondack chairs that dot the lawn from the circle drive to the point.

Officially renamed Mission Point Resort, Shufelt’s efforts to bring together the natural beauty of The Mission, to restore and repurpose the eclectic collection of historic buildings, and to provide modern amenities established Mission Point Resort as a full-service resort operating on Mackinac Island. Over the next 27 years, Shufelt and the Mission Point staff earned the resort’s reputation each season as a favorite with island visitors from near and far, throughout the Midwest and around the globe.

### **Coming Home to Michigan - and to Mission Point**

In 2014, Michigan native Denny Ware and his wife Suzanne purchased Mission Point Resort, feeling the pull of home in the natural beauty of the island, and seeing great potential in the future of the resort and the entire island community. With Denny capping off a career as a successful business leader and sharing a passion for restoration and renovation with his wife and family, the Wares bring decades of experience and success to the task of ushering Mission Point Resort into the next stage of its storied history as one of Mackinac Island’s crown jewels.

### **Preserving the Past While Making History – The Best is Yet to Come**

Showcasing their commitment to the stewardship of the resort, the Ware family will begin the 2018 season by unveiling the completion of a \$5-million, four-year project to overhaul and renovate all 108 guest rooms and suites in the Main Lodge, as well as a full update of the



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electrical systems and utilities. More noticeable to long-time guests, however, may be the resort's revitalized décor, featuring a brighter palette of colors to reflect the bright skies and vibrant, natural hues of the island itself. Another major addition over the last few years is the Wares' development of Mission Point's full-service spa, reflecting the resort's commitment to wellness and relaxation. With much more on the drawing board and currently in the works, Mission Point Resort's future looks as bright, beautiful and boundless as the vistas on display from the Great Lawn - available to any of Mackinac Island's residents and visitors from a comfortable Adirondack chair.

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