

FISHTOWN PRESERVATION

Assuring public access to Fishtown and maintaining its historical integrity, working waterfront, and stories through preservation, education, and stewardship.

FALL/WINTER 2016

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WHERE to BEGIN?

Perhaps we should start in 2006, ten years ago, when the Carlson family decided to sell its properties on the north side of the Leland River. After years of caring for Fishtown, now the Carlsons needed someone—a person or organization—that would be preservation-minded and care about Fishtown as much as they did.

Perhaps we should start in 1959, nearly sixty years ago, when Adelia Ball Morris purchased a shanty on the south side of the river so that it would be available for commercial fishermen—or perhaps in 1986, when she gave it to the Leelanau Historical Society (LHS), on the condition that it continue to be used for commercial fishing.

Or perhaps we should start just in the summer of 2015, just over a year ago, when Francie Gits of LHS asked if we'd like to take over care of their shanty—or perhaps just a few weeks later, when Mark Carlson asked us if we'd like to buy the vacation-rental shanty next door to it, as an addition to the portion of Fishtown we already protect.

Or maybe the best time to start is *right now*. It's true that Fishtown has a deep and rich history. The work of Fishtown Preservation, however, is not just about history but about the future. The "Save Fishtown" campaign that began in 2006 was wildly successful—yet we are, each year (and sometimes it feels like each *day*), seeking to fund the continued work. And with each successful year the work of saving Fishtown grows larger.

Each year tens of thousands of visitors visit Fishtown, sometimes coming from great distances, yet most of these visitors know little about Fishtown's history as a commercial fishery, or that commercial fishing is still our defining mission today. Few of the photographers or painters who now capture Fishtown know about the role art has played in the prominence and survival of this special place. Not many of the parents who are bringing

their children here to share their own childhood memories know they are part of a tradition stretching back more than a century.

Not enough people know that saving Fishtown is now, and always will be, the mission and work of Fishtown Preservation.

I want you to know all of this. I also want you to know that "Fishtown Preservation" is actually you: You and your family, friends and neighbors, and *their* family, friends and neighbors, too. Saving Fishtown is what we do every day, because you've decided it's important, and you've made it possible.

I want you to know that we are facing great challenges right now, as we assume responsibility for more of the buildings in Fishtown—and for the growing library of stories from and about the people whose lives have filled Fishtown.

I want you to know that **I'm asking you to do more.**

But I also want you to know that, if you love Fishtown, you are part of a tough group—and a dedicated, determined, loyal (and really wonderful!) group. Fishtown still exists because people have always stepped up to the next challenge. We're going to continue that long tradition because the more we learn about Fishtown, the more of Fishtown we want (and need) to save.

And please know how grateful I am, too. Today I'm one of the people dedicated to preserving Fishtown. To save our history we must always be thinking about the future—and the future, of course, begins **right now.** ■

Joel Petersen, Captain of the *Joy*, getting ready to set trap nets for whitefish, May 2016. Shore work is a major part of the work of commercial fishing. The acquisition of the south side properties, including the docks, shanties and deep lots, ensures the preservation of space integral to the ongoing needs of commercial fishing operations. PHOTO BY AMANDA HOLMES



**"FISHTOWN PRESERVATION" IS ACTUALLY YOU:
YOU AND YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS,
AND *THEIR* FAMILY, FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS, TOO.
SAVING FISHTOWN IS WHAT WE DO EVERY DAY.**

BOTH SIDES NOW

Francie Gits stopped in my doorway. It was late summer 2015—a busy time for both of us. “Do you think,” she asked when I looked up, “that Fishtown Preservation would be interested in taking ownership of our fishing shanty?”

It took me only a moment to reply. “Yes,” I said. “Yes we do, absolutely.”

Francie is executive director of the Leelanau Historical Society (LHS). We rent office space in the museum from LHS—our offices are just a few steps apart—so I talk with Francie almost every day. I knew “our fishing shanty” to be the historic Smith-Buckler Shanty on the south side of the Leland River, directly across from the properties we purchased in 2007. LHS had been allowing our fishing operations to use the shanty for years to store nets and anchors and the bulky necessities of a commercial fishing operation (the shanty was built to support commercial fishing; see “For Fishing Only” on page 6 for more on its largely unknown history, as well as why we’ve begun calling it the Morris Shanty).

I had to talk with our board of directors, of course, but I knew I’d find enthusiasm to accept such a generous offer. The shanty includes 42 feet of dock frontage and a deep lot we’d already found indispensable. At the same time, I knew there would be some real concerns; we already had a good idea of the expense it takes to maintain a Fishtown shanty.

About two weeks later my phone rang. It was Mark Carlson. “Amanda,” he said, “Bill and I have decided to sell our shanty on the south side of the river.”

My heart dropped. The shanty just happens to be right next to the LHS shanty, with the same dock frontage and deep rectangle of land. It’s a refurbished (and popular) vacation rental, but its looks blend right in with Fishtown’s character. I knew the property had no restrictions on development—that it could be torn down and replaced with almost anything.

They’d been thinking about selling for a while, just

amongst themselves, Mark explained, but people were beginning to figure out that something was happening. Already one man had asked about it, looking for a place to dock his 55-foot cigarette boat. The family planned to list it in a month.

“But before putting it up for sale to the public,” he continued, “we thought we’d see if Fishtown Preservation would be interested. We’re happy to hold off the listing for a few weeks, so you have time.”

I felt something then, too, although I’m not sure if it was relief, at least not entirely. “We’re interested,” I said. “But I’m going to have to get back to you.”

There was no question we’d accept the LHS offer of its shanty, but how could we even *think* of taking on another mortgage even as we were fundraising for the final payments for the original purchase as well as for serious infrastructure needs?

Reader, we bought it. The more we considered, the more we realized the opportunity Mark’s call presented—and the danger, too. From the north side of the river, the wonderful view has these shanties right in the middle. We’d been lucky that the owners of the properties had loved and cared for them and for Fishtown, but we couldn’t take that for granted any longer. If a shanty came onto the open market, offering docking space and views of the Manitou from within Fishtown, what might happen if the buyer felt no affection for the character or timelessness of this place?

In the end, we realized, there is only so much Fishtown out there. To protect it, we decided to take this step, too.

It helped that, by yet another coincidence, we’d begun preparing for just such an opportunity. A few weeks before Mark Carlson’s call, the Fishtown Preservation



board approved a new strategic plan. We'd never limited ourselves, in the extensive and systematic research and interpretation projects we've already completed, to boundary lines. After all, the stories, the adventures, the lives of the fishermen—these all encompass Fishtown, Leland and well beyond. Fishtown has always been part of a large world.

In our new strategic plan, we tried to imagine how we'd respond to a chance to add properties on the south side of the river—however unlikely that event seemed. “We never could have anticipated,” said Kathryn Eckert, the chair of the board, “that we'd have the incredible opportunity to acquire these properties so soon on the heels of that decision.” Still, actually making the decision—making the commitment—was a sobering moment.

By mid-November 2015 we'd entered into an agreement to acquire the Carlson property, provided we could obtain a certain level of funding quickly. For us, the Carlsons had turned away potential buyers and lowered the price to \$620,000. We needed, before finalizing the purchase, to generate sufficient upfront commitments to assure we could manage the debt service.

With little time to raise the funds, we asked our Anchors and a handful of other supporters for help. Within weeks 35 of our Anchors and other donors, in amounts ranging from \$500 to \$50,000, astonished us with \$238,500 in gifts and pledges. We made the down payment on the property in early February 2016.

There is even good news for Fishtown's future. With the official transfer of the shanty from the LHS, Fishtown Preservation also gained the right of first refusal on the neighboring property to the east. The Hall family,

whose property lies to the west, has been dedicated to the preservation of their shanty for more than 60 years, including a protective easement on land to the west, now managed by Leland Township.

In the months since these additions, we've been working closely with Leland's Township Planning Commission and Township Board to include these south side properties in the C-4 Fishtown Historic District. For the next year we'll be developing a comprehensive vision for the use and management of these properties, in the process bringing together as many ideas as possible to assure we plot the best course for Fishtown's future. That plan will include a central role for Fishtown as an active commercial fishery—the defining feature that connects Fishtown past and future.

You, too, have a special role in that future. We've made this investment on behalf of all the people who value Fishtown, and we'll need your help to keep this commitment. Our initial group of donors made it possible for us to sign the agreement and make a large down payment. We want to clear our remaining debt obligation as soon as possible, so that we can focus on the coming needs of Fishtown. We hope you will help.

The sale of the south side shanty also represents the first time in 110 years that the Carlson family does not own property in Fishtown. Bill and Jennifer and Mark and Laurie Carlson worked for decades to protect Fishtown when it was at its most vulnerable, when the Great Lakes commercial fishing heritage was in danger of vanishing.

As a small appreciation for their vision, foresight and fortitude, Fishtown Preservation is declaring them **Fishtown Anchors for life.** ■

For FISHING ONLY

The shanty the Leelanau Historical Society (LHS) transferred to Fishtown Preservation in the spring of 2016 is the Fishtown shanty with the longest continuous use for commercial fishing purposes.

Portions of the Smith-Buckler Shanty, as it's sometimes known, date to 1904 and includes parts from two earlier shanties, with a shanty on the north shore of the river being joined with part of one on the south side of the river. In the 1920s the Buckler family expanded the shanty by cutting the already-cobbled structure in half and adding new construction in the middle—but these were not to be the last modifications.

LHS acquired the shanty in 1986 from Adelia Ball Morris and her daughter Barbara Goodbody (see “For the Love of Diggie Morris” on page 10) and leased it, as they had, to Fishtown commercial fishermen. That same year Lake Michigan reached near-record highs, flooding this and many other shanties in Fishtown. While some of the shanties were raised a foot or more, commercial fisherman Ross Lang and his crew—following the same mix of frugality and practical skills used for the shanty’s earlier modifications—simply added a second, additional floor about a foot higher and thus sufficient to be above the high water.

When Fishtown Preservation acquired from the Carlson family the core Historic Fishtown properties on the north side of the Leland River in February 2007, we also leased south side property from LHS, including the shanty; lot space for storage, maintenance and net repair; and dock space for berthing *Janice Sue*, one of our two commercial fishing vessels.

Soon afterward, LHS made significant repairs to the roof and façade of the shanty. However, the return of high lake water levels in 2014, as well as recent changes in the drainage and water flow patterns around the shanty, revealed that parts of the shanty’s support system were rotting and/or being undermined. River otters also kept finding ways into the space between the two floors, with eight to ten making use of the shanty—including as an outhouse. Otters are entertaining visitors to Fishtown, but less than ideal tenants.

When LHS and Fishtown Preservation discussed the shanty’s maintenance needs, we also referred back to the original bequest. Adelia Ball Morris and Barbara Goodbody had specified, when giving the shanty to LHS, that it must be used only for activities and education related to commercial fishing and its history—the mission of Fishtown Preservation, if it had existed in 1986.

It became clear to both of our organizations that a change made sense. LHS had served as careful stewards of the shanty for thirty years; now it was time for Fishtown Preservation to assume the responsibility for its care.

Of course, there are always details to any transfer of property. In addition to an environmental assessment and other due diligence, we also wanted to ensure that the restrictions Adelia and Barbara had placed on the property would remain intact following the title transfer. Fishtown Preservation took title to the property on March 31, 2016, and it was placed under our existing Historic Fishtown C-4 zoning easement in early October.

Our next steps are to evaluate, plan and raise funds for the shanty repairs. The shanty now houses nets and other equipment used in the fishing operations, as well as a number of Fishtown artifacts. To begin the evaluation, our contractors tell us, will require emptying the shanty.

The first sign of progress will be the raising of a temporary storage structure—a shed, in other words. Other fishing sheds have shared this land in the past, and like them, it will contain the equipment in active use by the commercial fishing operation. Even as repairs begin, the property will evoke the landscape of the past.

Brian Price plans to play a key role in the repairs. He’s now a member of the Fishtown Preservation board, and was a founding leader at the Leelanau Conservancy. Before either of these roles, however, Brian fished as crew to Ross Lang. “Ross and I built that [higher] floor,” he said. It was something they did as a temporary fix. Now, he says, it’s time to make it right **for the long term.** ■

In 2016 Barbara Goodbody honored her family's ties to this south side Fishtown shanty by commissioning artist Neil Walling to paint its portrait.

**"IT MUST BE USED ONLY FOR
COMMERCIAL FISHING."**

"The OTHERSIDE"

BETWEEN 1900 AND 1920 AS MANY AS SIX STRUCTURES WERE BUILT IN FISHTOWN AND THEN VANISHED. THESE disappearances were not a mystery, however. Fishermen built the structures to store equipment and to use for the extensive shore work that's part of a commercial fishing operation. Leland had no harbor then, not even a break wall to protect from the wind and waves coming off Lake Michigan, and the water swept away a couple of the early buildings. The fishermen therefore built vernacular wood structures they could remove, repair and replace as needed.

When George Cook and Martin Brown in 1903 went together into the commercial fishing business in Leland, fishing from the *Why Not*, an open Mackinaw boat, they also built a shanty. What sets apart the Cook and Brown shanty is that it has lasted into the present, although sometimes in unexpected ways.

In the decades since the shanty's construction, it remained in continuous use for commercial fishing, housing the operations of Cook, Brown, Nash, Strayer, Buckler, Steffens and Lang—sometimes singly, sometimes in partnership. By the 1970s, however, the shanty was in rough shape.

The Carlson family purchased the shanty in 1977, at the same time they were acquiring additional properties on the north side of the river—what they sometimes affectionately called "The Otherside." They asked Jim VerSnyder, a longtime friend, fisherman, farmer and jack of all trades, to make the building suitable for storage for the growing number of Fishtown businesses. Around the year 2000, the Carlsons decided to remodel the shanty into a vacation rental.

The shanty was remodeled to remain consistent with the character of Fishtown, including its appearance from the north side of the river, where visitor traffic is highest. The Carlsons turned to architect David Hanawalt to produce a remodeling plan, but in true Fishtown fashion the building crew decided to modify the plan, aligning the riverside dormers with the outer walls to enlarge the two second-story bedrooms.

What remains of the shanty today is the core of the original structure. The Carlsons were unable to reuse as much of the original building as they'd intended. However, photos from the early phases of the project show they retained the framing structure and interior walls. The building is also within its original building envelope and, except for the added dormers, the doors and windows remain in their original locations.

Under Fishtown Preservation ownership, **the shanty will continue to operate as a seasonal rental** and as the continuation of what has become, for several families, a more than decade-long tradition: a weeklong stay in a one-of-a-kind property. ■



GENEROUS CONTRIBUTORS

who made possible Fishtown Preservation's purchase of "The Otherside"

Sally and Sandy Bracken
Caroline Brady
Sherri and Michael Brom
Carolyn and Richard Chormann
Sandra and Michael Clark
Rhea and Mike Dow
Nancy and Berkley Duck
Stephanie and Mark Duckmann
Janet and John Dunn
Lynn and Bruce Dunn
Emerson Electric
Nancy and Jeffery Fisher
Elizabeth and Jim Fisher
Joanne and Jay Fisher
William Fortune, Jr and Joseph D. Blakely
Jane and Richard Kiernan
Janet Kreger
Lucy Lambert
Robin and John Ling
Lisa and Ted Neild
W. Allen Northcutt and Ellen F. Mershon
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Lisa and David Schimmel
Leslie and Walter Schmid
Ann and David Shane
Ann and Chris Stack
Kay and Dan White
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Dr. Robert Willard
Randy and Joanie Woods
Liz and Scot Zimmerman
Anonymous (2)

Pro bono realtor services
provided by Tim Schaub

The interior of the two story shanty is finished in wood, giving it throughout a warm and cozy glow. For rental information, call 231-256-8878. PHOTO BY AMANDA HOLMES

(OPPOSITE PAGE) Mark and Bill Carlson worked hard to retain the historic fabric and features of their south side shanty when they converted it to a seasonal rental ca. 2000. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARK CARLSON

by AMANDA J. HOLMES, FPS Executive Director

For the LOVE of DIGGIE MORRIS

When Leland's Fishtown did not quietly vanish the way most of Michigan's small commercial fishing villages did, what survived was more than the boats, buildings and docks. What also survived was commercial fishing itself, as a livelihood and a way of life. **Not many people know the pivotal role Diggie Morris played** in keeping it alive here.

The critical decade for Great Lakes commercial fishing was the 1950s. Invasive species like the sea lamprey—an ancient, parasitic fish that had made it up the Welland Canal into the Great Lakes—were devastating the population of lake trout and other commercial fish species. The future of commercial fishing looked grim, and the younger generations of longtime fishing families in Leland and elsewhere began turning to what seemed more promising vocations. The shanties they'd built for their fishing operations, facing the unforgiving lakeside weather, began to go vacant. After only a year or two without upkeep they began to tumble.

However, Fishtown has always been part of the larger community of Leland. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Leland, as with many small lakeshore towns, had become a refuge from the summer heat, drawing families from downstate and throughout the Midwest. By the 1950s these families had spent many summers walking the beaches, getting to know the fishermen as neighbors, eating the fish they caught and sometimes going out with them on the water, too. They knew what it was like to bring up a net full of fish. The engines of the fishing tugs sounded like nothing else, and people got used to the routine of their going and coming back. Leland was not going to give up Fishtown.

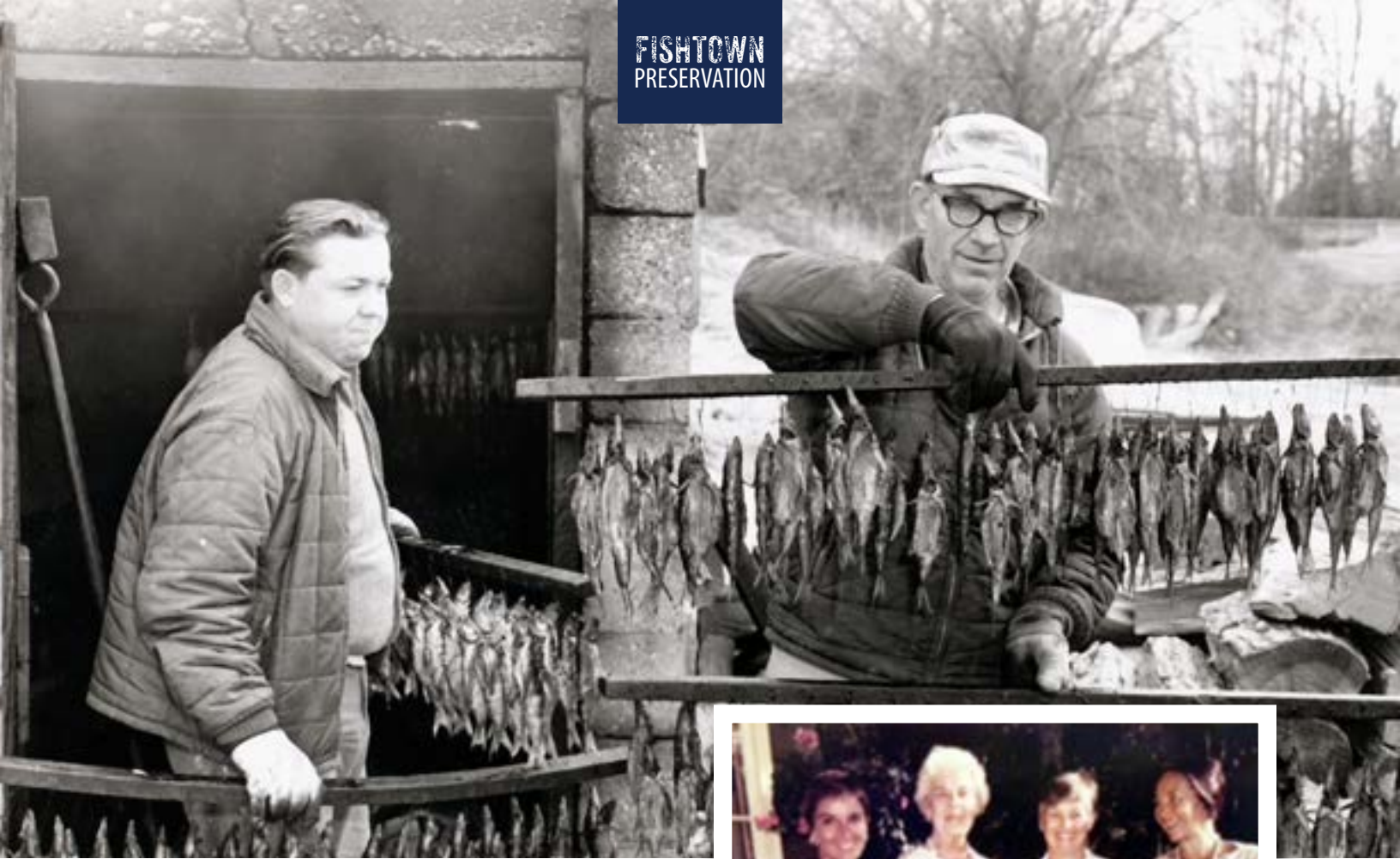
Cottagers began purchasing unused shanties, but most

of the time their reasons for purchase were as practical as the fishermen's reasons for selling: one needed the space, the other didn't. Bill F. Hall of Ft. Wayne, Indiana, was the first summer resident to purchase a shanty, in 1956. Located on the south side of the river, the shanty has long been a space for family guests and for retreat.

Three years after the Hall purchase, summer resident Allen Appel of Indianapolis, Indiana, purchased one of the shanties on the north side of the river. The Leland Harbor hadn't yet been constructed and he was interested mainly in the dock frontage, just as the Hall family from time to time docked a retired wood Coast Guard boat in front of their south-side shanty.

These two shanties foreshadowed what Fishtown would become. Allen Appel soon began renting his shanty to shopkeepers selling mainly to summer visitors, beginning a lineage that today extends to Tug Stuff. Fishtown Preservation is today indebted to the Hall family for the ongoing use of their dock to load and unload the large trap nets from *Joy*, as well as providing a location for her net tender, the smaller vessel used for setting and pulling up the nets.

But Diggie Morris—named Adelia by her parents, E. B. and Bertha Ball of Munice, Indiana—understood something about commercial fishing that was hard to see. She purchased a fishing shanty on the south side



(ABOVE) Roy Buckler (RIGHT) and his son Terry removing chub from the smoker, 1960s. COURTESY OF LEELANAU HISTORICAL SOCIETY

(RIGHT) Adelia Ball Morris (SECOND FROM LEFT) in the 1970s with her daughters Ann (Stack), Barbara (Goodbody) and Patricia (Ganter). PHOTO BY CARL GANTER AND COURTESY OF ANN STACK



in 1959, but her plans weren't about recreation. "At the time," says Barbara Goodbody, Diggee's daughter, "the Halls had taken ownership of their shanty. We all loved gathering there for parties, yet it was more important to Mother and I to preserve ours."

By *preservation*, Diggee and Barbara meant preservation not just of a building but of a place for the activity of commercial fishing. Diggee had developed a longtime friendship with commercial fisherman Roy Buckler, and she wanted him to have space to continue fishing. The actual *fishing* part of commercial fishing takes place on water, of course, but everything else takes place on shore, and to do these, fishing operations need space: space to keep anchors and supplies and vehicles, to build and repair nets, and to process the fish for the wholesale and retail buyers.

So when Diggee and Barbara bought the shanty, they leased it to Roy—and more importantly, they decided that the shanty would be used exclusively for commercial fishing purposes. That use has continued unbroken into the present. The families who have operated commercial fishing businesses out of the shanty include, in order: Smith, Buckler, Maleski, Lang and Carlson. Now

Fishtown Preservation's two captains occupy the building: Alan Priest of the gillnetter *Janice Sue* and Joel Peterson of the trapnetter *Joy*.

"We couldn't have run the fishing business without the shanty," says Brian Price, who worked through the 1970s and early '80s with fisherman Ross Lang. Without space to dock boats, work and load nets, and arrange equipment, commercial fishing likely would have been squeezed out of Fishtown simply for lack of space. Fishing operations had always stored things in buildings and barns further inland, but they need space and reliable water access to do the daily work.

Diggee found a solution well before anybody else could see there was a problem. The shanty she bought and then dedicated to commercial fishing has been crucial to keeping alive Fishtown's founding purpose, and we're pleased that the shanty is newly under our stewardship. To honor Adelia Ball Morris' foresight and contribution, Fishtown Preservation is pleased to christen it the **Morris Shanty**. ■

COURTESY OF BARBARA GENTILE



1900s

PHOTO BY ERHARDT PETERS, COURTESY OF
LEELANAU HISTORICAL SOCIETY



1930s



1980s

FISHTOWN'S S

PHOTO BY ERHARDT PETERS, COURTESY OF LEELANAU HISTORICAL SOCIETY



1930s



COURTESY OF JOY LANG ANDERSON



1940s

COURTESY OF MARIANNE LENT



1970s

COURTESY OF GREG RIESIG

SOUTH SIDE



1960s

1960s

PHOTO BY ERHARDT PETERS, COURTESY OF LEE LANAU HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PHOTO BY ERHARDT PETERS,
COURTESY OF LEE LANAU
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Summer interns Grace Sullivan (RIGHT) and Eileen Mapes-Riordan in the Fishtown Welcome Center. PHOTO BY SUMMER MEYER

by GRACE SULLIVAN, FPS Summer Intern

Hard to LET IT GO

IN JULY FISHTOWN PRESERVATION HOSTED A 5K RACE on a hot Saturday morning. I arrived at the Fishtown Preservation offices in an earlier morning light than ever before and watched volunteers and racers alike rushing about with a palpable energy, sorting T-shirts by size and cutting orange slices. I found the heat oppressive in its strength, but it didn't stifle the enthusiasm of the people who participated—and this caused me to pause.

Perhaps there are simply a lot of people eager to wake up and run in the stagnant heat of a summer morning. Personally, I would've greeted such a challenge with apprehension and more than a few sighs. The energy I felt on that Saturday morning, however, was something unique, and after thinking about it, I think the people who spend time in this part of Northern Michigan are unique, too.

That morning, it was the shared challenge of running and a love for Fishtown that made the pulse of community beat so strongly, but I think there's something special about this particular region of Michigan. I've seen it in the humble grace of self-serve cherry standing by the side of the road, and the way the impossibly blue water refuses to stop kissing Michigan's pebbled shores. It's running into Keith Burnham in Leland and pausing to take a picture with his dog, Biscuit, for "The Leland Report." It's the race against time when a Moomer's ice cream cone is melting too fast. It's crowds gathering on the beach to reward the sun with reverent applause after

it dips beneath the waves of the lake. It's the magic of being Up North.

The Fishtown 5K allowed me to see, in real time, the things that I'd been feeling all summer: people who are united in their love for the places, people and experiences that make Northern Michigan so captivating. Fishtown itself—that it not only exists but thrives—is a testament to the dedication people feel toward preserving what Northern Michigan is. The excitement and the sense

of community at the 5K confirmed to me that Fishtown Preservation acts of behalf of those with Northern Michigan in their hearts.

My time in Michigan has drawn to a close. I'm deeply indebted to those who got me to this magical place and to those I met while here. Experiences like this are dependent upon and enhanced by the generosity of others—a gift I received time and again.

With my bags packed and most of my goodbyes said, I should've been ready to leave, but I wasn't. After a semester overseas and a summer in Michigan, I felt reluctant to return to school and to a reality I knew all too well. The time I spent here transformed me, and it was hard to let it go. Over the course of the summer and without at first realizing it, I joined the ranks of those runners and walkers at the 5K, of those "smitten with the Mitten"—of those entrenched in its wonder.

I wouldn't have it any other way. ■

**"I JOINED THE RANKS
OF THOSE 'SMITTEN
WITH THE MITTEN'"**

by MARSHA BUHR, FPS Welcome Center Manager

WELCOME to FISHTOWN

Fishtown Preservation's new Welcome Center faces Leland's Main Street, an ideal location to greet first-time and returning visitors as well as locals.

Here I've met people from across the US and around the world. When I share the story of Fishtown, including how it was "saved" and that it is now preserved forever, our visitors let me know how grateful they are for the work Fishtown Preservation is doing, both then and now.

I love that we can provide a personal, welcoming space where we can answer practical questions. Some of the questions are basic: What is Fishtown? How old is it? What do the green and white boats do? Do people still fish from Fishtown? What kind of fish do they catch? Is Fishtown open all year?

We're also able to help people get to know the local area and connect them with local businesses and services: What is a "must do" while visiting? Where's a good place to eat?

The Welcome Center is also a place to listen. We love gathering feedback and providing a way for people to become more deeply involved—sometimes by donating, and sometimes by sharing their stories. I've spoken with several older people who once lived in Leland and whose parents fished from Leland in the 1920s and '30s. I've heard from quite a few people who told me about visiting Fishtown as children. That memory has drawn them back, and now they're sharing Fishtown with their children or even their grandchildren. Many of them told me they haven't missed in returning at least once each year. "Fishtown is my therapy," one man told me. He comes just to sit and feel the sense of peace.

I'm a local resident, but not until

this summer have I known how much I didn't know! I'm fascinated by the history and want to dig deeper into every facet of Fishtown, especially the stories and people who have framed Fishtown's presence. I want to learn more about commercial fishing and the ecology of the Great Lakes, including the impact of invasive species in the past and present—and I want to go fishing now, too!

I'm excited by the work that's being done today, and the plans and investments being made for Fishtown's future. **Fishtown Forever!**



Marsha Buhr takes a break from setting up Fishtown Preservation's new Welcome Center.
PHOTO BY AMANDA HOLMES

by AMANDA J. HOLMES, FPS Executive Director

JOY of Leland

The traffic on both River Street and M-22, so light as to be almost theoretical, came to a halt just long enough for the truck to pull across, heading east. It was pulling a trailer, atop which was a weathered, 42-foot-long fishing boat. The truck's red and the boat's banged-up green and gray carved into the backdrop, a sky of translucent blue.

It was late November of last year, and *Joy* was heading inland for the latest round of maintenance and improvements Fishtown Preservation has undertaken over the past ten years.

Both *Joy* and *Janice Sue* are active commercial fishing vessels; they need to be both functional and safe for the fishermen who operate them. *Joy* has had more changes over the years than *Janice Sue*, mainly because she's been, since her creation, something of an experiment.

Ross Lang had been, with his father, a commercial fisherman in Leland since the late 1960s, fishing from the *Frances Clark*, a gill net boat. By 1980, however, Ross faced a choice: begin fishing with different nets, or get out of the fishing business. He chose to fish with new trap nets, a fundamentally different system, and that meant choosing a new vessel—or building one, which he did with the help of a friend and experienced craftsman, George Stevens. They built *Joy* at George's farm in East Leland.

Speed on the water mattered to Ross—more speed meant more efficiency, meant lifting more nets each hour on the water—so he kept *Joy* as light as possible. One compromise was to keep interior structural supports to the minimum. It did keep the weight down—but the boat twisted and bent on rough water, and walking on her was like walking on a giant metal drum where, at each step, the deck flexed down and then boomed back into place.

In 2008, Geoff Niessink, a grandson to Captain George Grosvenor, and Joel Petersen, a commercial fisherman

and captain of the *Joy*—both of them skilled boatsmen and masters of welding—added additional structural supports, as well as replacing sections of the 1/8-inch steel that had rusted thin.

They also wanted to raise the sides of the *Joy*, to increase stability as well as to make standing on *Joy*'s deck less precarious when lifting fish or just moving around, but that had to remain on their wish list. The next time she was out of the water, they hoped, they'd have a chance to do the sides.

Eight years later, the chance came. When *Joy* came out of the water for a fresh coat of marine paint, we had the chance not only to raise her sides—by nearly a foot—but also to replace the worn-out motor for the net-lifting hydraulics and to put on a new propeller.

Joy never had a propeller fitted for both her size and the power of her engine, a 255-horsepower Cummins 6CTA. In our first overhaul we kept the propeller she had when we bought the operation in 2007. Later Jerry Vanlandschoot and Joel Petersen borrowed a propeller that might fit a little better from Joey Peterson, a commercial fisherman on the Garden Peninsula. Whenever Joey would see me at meetings about commercial fishing, he'd inquire about the goings-on in Leland by asking, "How's my propeller?"

The work in 2008, for both *Joy* and *Janice Sue*, had taken place at the Northport Bay Boat yard, where a lack of indoor space meant we had to build a temporary shelter, rigged with utilities, to do the work through the wintry off-season. For this stage of work, though, we found a perfect place right in Leland: Nick Lederle's



impressively well-equipped machine shop, located near Stander Marine.

Geoff and Joel worked on *Joy* for nearly three months, finishing this past February. I knew I wouldn't fully appreciate all the work they'd done if I didn't see it in progress, so I stopped by every couple of weeks. I'd arrive to pieces of unshaped steel, sparks flying, and a duet of machine sounds coming from various parts of the shop. They would politely point out a few things in-progress then turn back to their work, and I'd leave with my hair and clothes smelling of the peculiar, varied and occasionally toxic smoke that floats around the ceiling of an active machine shop. Outside, in the early dark of that time of year, I'd find the muffled sounds familiar and oddly comforting.

The journey to the shop had been a utilitarian one, but the trip back through an otherwise deserted Leland took on the trappings of a quiet, solemn parade with *Joy* as the Grand Marshal. Geoff, like many of those who have served as crew in recent years, is a volunteer fireman. When Tim Newman, at the wheel of his Kason Contracting rig, pulled *Joy* from the machine shop just before noon on February 27, half a dozen trucks followed,

most driven by firemen who honored the history and the new life of the *Joy*. There are moments when you realize you have become witness to something far bigger than yourself, that you are seeing made visible the thread of a community of place and of work, that what you thought was a singular event is in fact just the latest knot on that unbroken thread. No boat, I realized, could be better loved.

When she returned to the river, *Joy's* sides glistened black against green. She looked strong and seaworthy, ready for the season ahead. Fresh paint, retooled engines, steel braced and raised and patched—*Joy* and the dozens of fishing vessels that came before her have been the lifeblood of Fishtown. They are the dreams of an entire community, molded into metal and laid with care into the waters.

Stop the traffic. *Joy* is coming through. ■

(ABOVE) In November 2015 Tim Newman of Kason Contracting hauled the *Joy* across Leland to where she would spend the next three months getting repairs and upgrades. PHOTO BY JIM BURNHAM

(BELOW) Geoff Niessink, at work on the *Joy's* maintenance project. The raw metal of the newly raised side of the *Joy* stretches below him. PHOTO BY AMANDA HOLMES



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Meet **Summer Meyer**, who joined the staff of Fishtown Preservation in February 2016, and brings with her years of local banking experience and a commitment to community service.

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VAN'S GARAGE has been a Fishtown Business Anchor since 2011. The family's history has been entwined with Leland and Fishtown since 1930. Though their business was automobile service, they also helped out commercial fishermen with fish tug engine repairs.

Van's location on Main Street and next to the Leland River gives them a front seat to all the activities in the community. Tracy and JP Van Raalte also signed up Van's Garage as a sponsor of our 2016 Friends of Fishtown 5K. PHOTO BY AMANDA HOLMES



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Anchor Program	Supporters who commit to donating a minimum amount to the Annual Fund , beginning at either \$500 (Personal Anchors) or \$250 (Business Anchors).
Fishtown Purchase Fund	Donations and pledges to complete the purchase of Fishtown properties on both sides of the Leland River, including balances due in 2017, 2019 and 2020.
Special Projects	Funds for specific brick-and-mortar projects, such as the Carlson Fishery rehabilitation, the foundations of the Village Cheese Shop and Morris Shanty, and landscape restoration.
"Fishtown Forever"	Gifts by bequest or estate.
Endowment	Long-term financial resources to support and promote the activities and programs of Fishtown Preservation.

ONGOING PROJECTS

WE'VE HAD A YEAR PACKED WITH GOOD NEWS AND WE'VE dedicated this issue of the newsletter to sharing that good news.

All this good news has been a challenge, of course. We have been fundraising for the final payments related to the 2006 purchase of Fishtown, and now we have added the new purchase of the south side property.

In addition, throughout the year we have also continued

to work on moving forward with our other projects. We remain in the midst of resolving drainage and water flow issues that are preludes to the coming restoration of the site's landscape, as well as the rehabilitation of the Carlson Fishery Shanty and repairs to the concrete foundation of the Village Cheese Shanty.

If you would like additional information on any of these other projects, please let us know. ■



Fishtown

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Keith Burnham
Laura Quackenbush

FPS STAFF

Amanda Holmes
Summer Meyer

VESSEL CAPTAINS

Joel Petersen (*Joy*)
Alan Priest (*Janice Sue*)

WELCOME CENTER STAFF

Marsha Buhr
Murielle Buhr
Hadley Vukosovich

SUMMER INTERNS

Eileen Mapes-Riordan
Grace Sullivan

P.O. Box 721
203 E. Cedar St.
Leland, MI 49654



ON THE COVER: Frank Steffens, Sr., active commercial fisherman in Fishtown from 1910-1954. COURTESY OF JOHN WESTOL

Joy newly arrived at Nick Lederle's machine shop in Leland for maintenance and to have her sides raised, the trip overseen by, from left to right, Tim Newman, Panta Leon, Darryl Herman, Geoff Niessink, Joel Petersen, Nick Lederle and Duane Newman, November 2015. PHOTO BY JIM BURNHAM