

# Alcona Historical Society

P.O. Box 174, Harrisville MI 48740

Spring 2023



**Sturgeon Point Lighthouse**



**Bailey School House**



**Lincoln Train Depot**

## President Letter

Greetings,

As we are gearing up for another season we are excited about the events and activities that we have going on. Details on these activities can be found within this newsletter.

We are in the process of hiring museum workers for the summer at all three museums and are looking for volunteers. If you or someone you know would like to work for Alcona Historical Society, please contact us at [ahs@alconahistoricalsociety.com](mailto:ahs@alconahistoricalsociety.com). Please use this same email if you are interested in volunteering. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sturgeon Point State Park museums will be open Friday, Saturday and Sundays from Memorial Day weekend until Labor Day. We look forward to having you visit us this summer.

We are planning on having the Lincoln Depot open on Saturdays throughout the summer.

The entire interior of the Sturgeon Point Lighthouse keeper's quarters has been painted since we closed last fall. We are looking spiffy! We are updating some of the exhibits and giving everything a good cleaning. That brings us to the topic of the spring clean up.

We had a successful Cabin Fever lecture series. We will end the series at the Annual meeting on Thursday, May 18<sup>th</sup>. There will be a short meeting at 6:30 with a presentation at 7:00. We are excited to have Ric Mixter return with another topic. He will speak on the November Gales of the Great Lakes.

The Harrisville Depot Committee continues to move forward. They are working on fundraising and have written and are waiting to hear on several grants to help with the restoration activities. You can check out their website at [www.harrisvilledepot.com](http://www.harrisvilledepot.com) or their Facebook page.

We are looking forward to the upcoming season and hope to see you at one or all of our museums or events this summer. If you have any thoughts or ideas for the Society, or have concerns please don't hesitate to contact me at (989) 471-2088 or via email at [ahs@alconahistoricalsociety.com](mailto:ahs@alconahistoricalsociety.com).

Sincerely, Kristin Benghauser

Plan Your Summer  
**Staycation!**

## Lincoln Depot Update

After many years of being a silent stalwart in our community, AHS is seeking to have Lincoln Depot OPEN regularly for the community this summer! Making this happen requires **YOUR** help!

It was a community undertaking to make the Depot what it is today. A museum showcasing the history and birth of the Village of Lincoln. Continuing that theme, the Depot can only be open with the help of volunteers. Ideally, it will be open to the public for 3-4 hours every Saturday from Memorial to Labor Day.

Volunteers would need to be present to open, close and answer questions. If you or anyone you know is interested, please reach out to us via email at adamhitch913@gmail.com or phone at 989-464-8952.

We will have a small gathering in mid-May to walk through the facility and “train” whoever wants to share this facility with visitors..

Remember, it literally, “Takes a Village!”

## Family Fun Day

Planned for August

Tower Climb, Petoskey Stone Hunt, Watercolor Art Project, Bake Sale and more. The Keepers’ Quarters, Gift Shop, and Bailey School will all be open. Anna Marck, performance artist, presents her one-woman show, “Women of the Watch: Keepers of the Light” twice during the afternoon; she will be “in character” at the Lighthouse throughout the day. We are pleased to have “Smoking Trolls” food truck from Hubbard Lake to serve your luncheon needs; plan on having lunch at one of the many picnic tables on the grounds. Visit the AHS website for complete information closer to the date. See you at Family Fun Day!

## Spring Clean up at Sturgeon Point

On Wednesday, May 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 we will be meeting at the Sturgeon Point State Park to do some cleaning up and reorganizing. Our main goal is to get the keeper’s quarters back to normal. In order to paint, everything was moved and packed away so we need you to help vacuum and sweep; move furniture (nothing too heavy); unpack, clean and wash artifacts; wash windows and get ready for the summer season. It’s a big project but with several helping hands we can get the work done. Cleaning supplies will be provided. Refreshments and lunch will be served. Hope to see you there. Call Kristin if you have questions – (989) 471-2088



## ALCONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD MEMBERS

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Please visit our website at [www.alconahistoricalsociety.com](http://www.alconahistoricalsociety.com)

Dear Friends of Alcona Historical Society,

We are asking you once again to support Alcona Historical Society with your annual membership. Your past support and membership indicate that you share the Society's goals and objectives in preserving and protecting the historical resources in Alcona County. We truly appreciate your involvement, whether it is your membership or donations, your willingness to volunteer at one of the Society's historical sites, attending one of our events, or providing historical items or information. All of these activities allow the Alcona Historical Society to continue to grow.

We also encourage you to consider receiving your newsletter via email. This saves the Society quite a bit in printing and postage costs. If this is an option you would like to try, please give us your email address on the form below.

Please complete the membership form below and send it with your check to Alcona Historical Society, P. O. Box 174, Harrisville, MI 48740. If you have any questions regarding membership, please do not hesitate to contact me at (989) 471-2088 or by email – [k\\_benghauser@yahoo.com](mailto:k_benghauser@yahoo.com).

Thank you so much for being a part of Alcona Historical Society and supporting the work we do.

Sincerely,

Kristin Benghauser, Membership

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email  
address \_\_\_\_\_

I do not have an email address. Please mail my newsletter. \_\_\_\_\_

### TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP:

Individual - \$20 \_\_\_\_\_ Family - \$35 \_\_\_\_\_ Sponsor - \$55 \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to pay more than one year - \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact me so that I may learn more about volunteer opportunities \_\_\_\_\_

***Kristin Benghauser, AHS Membership Chair, P.O. Box 174, Harrisville MI 48740***

# Uncle Billy Cullings As the Story Goes

William F. Cullings, known as Uncle Billy, was a salt-water fisherman from England where he was raised aboard a ship. He arrived at Thunder Bay Island in 1835 by sailboat then crossed the bay to Alpena. Historical accounts say that he was the first white man to set foot in the area, where he befriended native people of the Alpena Tribe. He learned the ways of the woods and secrets of hunting, trapping and fishing from them as well as a love of the Northeastern Michigan woods and waters that kept him wandering through them for more than 50 years.

Uncle Billy was a contemporary of Simeon Holden, Robert McMullen, William Hill and many other early commercial fishermen of Alpena County. He was known up and down the shore for his nomadic life, daring feats, and colorful stories.

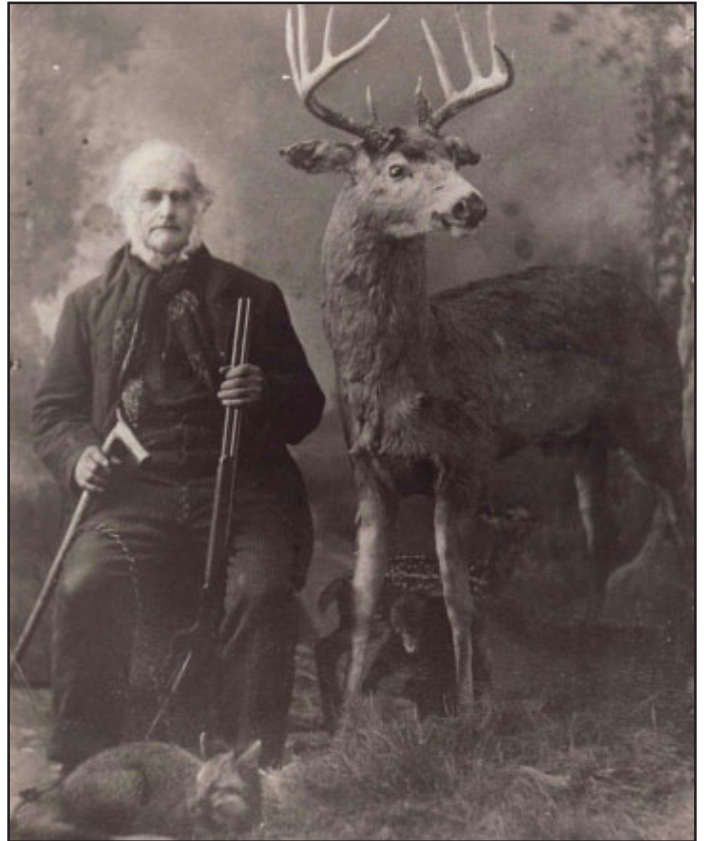
In June of 1890 Uncle Billy was interviewed by a reporter from the Alpena Echo newspaper. Excerpts from the interview were included in a radio broadcast by Ann Taber in 1952. Below is a compilation of quotations from the script for her talk about Uncle Billy that provide a glimpse into his character and life.

He was one of the characters of this region... a nomad really and truly, doing as he pleased – bothering only to make enough money to keep body and soul together – eating when he felt hungry, sleeping where the shade of night overtook him, and generally making himself a friend to all whose path might cross his.

The reporter from the paper had gone down to the spot where Uncle Billy was camping at the moment and had a talk with the old codger. Uncle Billy was about ninety take or give a few at that time. The mansion wherein the reporter found him residing consisted of the sail of his little boat forming the roof and back and one side while a pile of shingles formed the third side and the fourth side of the makeshift shack remained open for his doorway.

“I’m on my way to Upper Presque Isle”, he said – “I’ve fished up there for the past six-eight years. I’ll do some trappin’ yet for a couple ‘o weeks and then start fishing. Fishing ain’t so good as it was a few years ago. Why I’ve seen the time when the injuns used to spear good big whitefish but they’d never get only enough to eat less they was going on a hunt. I used to do a big business here years ago with my furs and fish but them days be gone by. I make a livin now and I’m content.”

Anyone who dared to come up here to live before it was settled had to have courage and stick-to-it-ivness... I came across a story about Uncle Billy that attests to... those



**William F. Cullings**

characteristics. (Here it is.)

Back in August 1845 Issac Wilson...his wife...son...and sister were landed by the schooner Baltic at Devil River, now known as Ossineke... to engage in lumbering... The family were completely isolated... had lived (there) for six weeks before seeing a white person... Then in October they were astonished to see a party of half-starved white men... the crew of the fisherman Alan Terry which had been carried away by gale... and had made land at Black River. The men had been without food... five days – they’d left their boat and wandered (north) along the shore until they discovered the tracks left by Mr. Wilson’s cattle. The Wilson’s gave them food and shelter. In November they had another surprise visit – another boat crew driven ashore at Devil River. These men were Robert McMullin and William Cullings – that’s right our Uncle Billy. They had left their fishing station (Thunder Bay) for home — down around Harrisville was home — but their boat picked up so much ice they were forced to shore.

And so their little settlement at Devil River (Ossineke) settled down for the winter – augmented by the two abandoned boat crews yet with provisions on hand for only the Wilson family itself. And that winter of 1845 was a blinger

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too. By January snow lay to a depth of four feet on the level. (Next) a party of half-breed hunters had been caught out in a blizzard and they wandered about in the snow until they, half starving, stumbled into Mr. Wilson's already overcrowded cabin. . . The Wilsons again divided the dwindling provisions with these newcomers. By the end of April the snow on the ground had increased to five feet and it was then that Uncle Billy thought up his plan.

No provisions could come until the lake broke . . . word had been received by way of the primitive mail system – Indians on dog sleds – that the supply ship had been wrecked. So Uncle Billy picked four of the best men from the batch at the Wilson's. They rigged up a boat with runners and pushed and pulled it out onto the lake over the ice until they reached open water. Then they launched their boat and set sail for Point Aux Barques (at the top of the thumb where the supplies were). They were seven days hauling their boat over ice before they reached open water on May 1. And then . . . a gale came up and drove them, surrounded by ice, toward the Charity Islands (south east of Tawas) where they just managed to get on shore and save their boat from being crushed.

But this didn't stop Uncle Billy. . . they again set sail and this time made it and accomplished successfully a voyage that has scarcely its equal on the lakes for bravery. Yes, Uncle Billy Cullings, Alpena's first white citizen, was in-

deed a character . . . there are probably dozens more incidents of his feats, of use of his knowledge of the woods and waters, of his good will toward his fellow man that have not been written down - but had they been recorded would be a record of a pioneer life . . .

## **Annual Meeting**

### **Mark your calendar now**

The Alcona Historical Society annual meeting will take place on Thursday, May 18, 6:30 p.m. at Alcona Township Hall - 5576 US 23, Black River, MI. The township hall is just north of Black River Rd. There will be a short review of what has been accomplished by the Historical Society in the last year. Refreshments will be served. The public is welcome. At 7:00 Ric Mixter will present a lecture on the November Gales of the Great Lakes.

Autumn storms are notorious on the Great Lakes and Ric has studied their devastating effect for over 25 years. This lecture features storms in 1905, 1913, 1940 and the wrecks of the Fitzgerald, Morrell, and Bradley. Rare interviews with survivors as well as footage from each of the ships makes this spellbinding lecture very special.

## **Lincoln safe cracked**

***Burglars Visit the D. & M. Railway Station.  
But Little Cash Secured. No Clue to Burglars.***

***From the files of the Alcona County Review  
July 26, 1900***

The quiet little town of Lincoln was visited by burglars last night and two safes were robbed. The safe at the D. & M. station was blown all to pieces and about sixty cents in money taken. The papers were torn and scattered about the room in the worst confusion.

The store of John Miller was also visited. His safe was not locked, but the burglars took about \$7.00 in change, all there was in the safe.

Two strangers were noticed about the village yesterday, there is a suspicion that they might throw light on the robbery. Further than this there is no clew (sic).

This is the fourth burglary to occur in this vicinity within a short time. It will afford great satisfaction to the citizens if the officers succeed in landing some of the guilty parties.



**D&M Railway safe blown open, note the safe door on the floor lower left side.**



Dear Members,  
**Happy Spring!**

We hope you are looking forward to summer. After having a successful artwork raffle last year we decided to start out this year with a repeat raffle. We are offering the Alcona Historical Society membership only the opportunities to buy raffle tickets again.

Enclosed you will find raffle tickets. Tickets can be purchased for \$5 each or six tickets for \$25. To participate in this fundraiser, complete the information on the tickets and return them to the Society, with your money too, of course, and we will add your tickets to the drawing. If you would like to purchase more tickets than those enclosed, please contact us at (989) 724-6384

The drawing will take place at our June 19th meeting at 7:00 p.m. at Alcona County Library in Harrisville. We will announce the winners shortly after the meeting.

Thank you in advance for supporting Alcona Historical Society.

Stay healthy and be safe.

Sincerely,

Alcona Historical Society Board of Directors