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With unbounded faith in the future, Editor C. R. Jackson of the Iosco Gazette took pencil in hand and fashioned this headline:

EAST TAWAS:  
The Coming Metropolis  
Of the North!

It was 1893 and the entire nation was experiencing one of the worst economic recessions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The US would not pull out of that nosedive until the turn of the century, despite the Chicago world's fair.

Thanks to the leadership of Mayor Temple Emery, East Tawas'es fortunes were never brighter, regardless of the fact that the now fabled white pine era had run its course in northern Lower Michigan.

Together with Nelson Holland of Saginaw, Holland and Emery Lumber Company had constructed a new sawmill on the site of today's Tawas Bay Beach Resort east of the state dock, a salt block, expanded docking facilities, a new two-story office building-store and the beautiful Holland Hotel.

The entire project, originating in 1891, was based on rafting white pine logs across Lake Huron from Canada. Unfortunately, that bubble burst only seven years later when Ontario cut off the supply of saw logs.

The inland area back of the Tawas was rapidly filling in with small farmers, working 40 to 120 acres of land, but this is getting ahead of the story about East Tawas.

The community known in the early days as east town, owed its origination to a crooked land agent, according to the diary of James O. Whittemore, first editor of the Iosco Gazette

George P. Smith and Henry Perkins Smith of Tonawanda, New York State, principle owners of the firm of Smith, Van Valkenburg and Company, had

retained a Bay City land agent by the name of Miller to locate some land for a mill site at Sand Point on Michigan's thumb.

According to the diary of Whittemore, resident manager of Tawas City's Whittemore Lumber Company, "It was a lucky break for us that Miller used the Smith's money to buy the site in his own name and then wanted to bleed them heavily before he would deed it to them."

That circumstance, he said, drove the Smiths to look for another site for their mill. They chose a site on Tawas Bay in Tawas Township, east of the struggling hamlet occupied by the pioneer Whittemore sawmill enterprise.

That event took place in 1864 and the Smiths, with substantial capital behind them, soon had their new mill in operation, purchased some additional land from the Whittemores and began setting off lots for a new town site. Incidentally, the Smith family is still associated with East Tawas through third and fourth generation members of the family at Tawas Beach Association.

By 1869, the new community of East Tawas had experienced rapid growth after the Civil War and, due to a conflict with the Whittemores over location of a road into the interior, the new township of Baldwin was organized. The organizational meeting was held in rooms over the company store at the southeast corner of Newman and Bay Streets.

The Whittemores had the political power in the county to build the Plank Road, but the inhabitants of Baldwin Township, led by George P. Smith, wanted their own road and got it---the Thompson Trail, today called Monument Road, starting at the East Tawas bridge. That old feud---now forgotten---was not forgiven, according to the late Edna M. Otis, local historian.

The founding mill company, reorganized as Smith and Westover, was sold in 1869 to the new firm of East Tawas Manufacturing Company, composed of Col. Henry J. Noyes of East Tawas, Orlando Hurd of Watkins, New York, and J. L. Wickes of East Saginaw. After another change in ownership, the Smiths again took possession of the mill.

The two timber towns, still with township governmental status, were

rapidly advancing in size from the 150 or so inhabitants in the entire county in 1860. East Tawas soon outdistanced its older neighbor in population, as well as number of operating sawmills and retail businesses. Both towns competed for the trade of farmers moving into the cutover inland area of surrounding townships. East Tawas' business district looked like this in the 1890s.

By 1887, East Tawas became an incorporated village, right at the manufacturing peak of its sawmills lining Tawas Bay. Its commercial dock at the foot of Newman Street was busy with schooners being loaded with white pine lumber, as well as being a port for passenger steamboats. Among mills along the bay were those owned by Temple Emery, William M. Locke and East Tawas Salt and Lumber Company.

East Tawas constructed its first waterworks system in 1887. The pumping station was combined with a municipal light and power plant, which operated until 1916, at which time the electrical system was sold for \$10,000 to Consumers Power Company. The original pumping station was located on the west side of Newman at the shore end.

The original water mains in East Tawas, made of wood, were manufactured locally by the American Pipe Company, organized here in May 1880, but sold a few years later to the Michigan Pipe Company at Bay City. The majority of the wooden mains were still in use in 1938 when replaced in a WPA project.

In spite of what has been written---that Michigan's lumbermen expected white pine to last forever---early timber cruisers employed by those timber operators had accurately predicted in the 1860s that the major stands of pine in Lower Michigan would be harvested by 1890.

That proved to be a fact and gave pause to local lumbermen---the year of 1891 saw the historic peak production of finished lumber in Iosco County. As a result, mill workers and their families began moving elsewhere in search of employment and the business outlook for the region was not favorable.

But East Tawas incorporated as a city in 1895 and its first mayor, Temple Emery, announced his plan of salvation. In exchange for the town's

purchase of two mill sites, the firm of Holland and Emery Lumber Company would build a modern sawmill to manufacture lumber, utilizing white pine logs cut in the French River region of Canada and towed across Lake Huron to East Tawas. Emery owned the log towing company, as well as his original mill, and Holland moved his mill equipment here from the Saginaw River

The community responded by turning the property over to Emery in 1891 and the new mill was constructed, along with a salt block to process salt brine extracted from a deep well, construction of a new office building-store at the southeast corner of Newman and Bay Streets, as well as a \$34,000 hotel---the Holland---on the opposite side of Newman.

Manufacture of lumber from Canadian logs came to an end in 1897, due to a tariff dispute in congress with neighboring Ontario. That was not the end of the lumber era here, however, as a mill owned by Walter Gardner and William Richards continued in business well into the first decade of the next century.

In 1884, Emery had convinced the Iosco County Fair Board to relinquish its property between East Tawas and Tawas City in exchange for parcels to the north, for the site of the Detroit, Bay City and Alpena's new shop complex, engine house and yard. The railroad's original shop location was at the intersection of First and Court Streets in Tawas city.

The DBC&A Railroad fell onto hard times in 1891 due to the reduction of its timber and lumber hauling business, but lingered on under mortgage foreclosure until 1895, when a new corporation, the Detroit and Mackinac Railway, purchased the line. The line's business was rapidly expanded, still hauling the products of the forest, produce from the inland farming area, gypsum ore and plaster manufactured at Alabaster, as well as cement from Alpena and limestone from Rogers City.

Most of the railroad's officials, as well as the majority of workmen in the mechanical shops, train operating crews and office employees, resided in East Tawas.

The railroad's workforce here was to stabilize the community's economy as well as politics for 30 or more years, or until automobiles decimated the

railroad passenger business nationally. The D&M continued in business until 1991 and its successor still operates along the Huron Shore. All vestiges of the D&M have been removed from the former rail yard, now occupied by Wal-Mart.

Coinciding with the D&M's history is the tourist and resort industry, which was fostered by the railroad in the 1890s with its excursion trains to its Tawas Beach Park and promotion of sport fishing along its route. Tourism blossomed into a major economic stimulus through development of the automobile and construction of improved roads.

By the 1920s, Southeastern Michigan residents employed in the automobile industry were enjoying top industrial wages of the day, along with annual vacations and week-end leisure time. They headed north on two-track trails in their Model Ts, but soon enjoyed faster cars and smoother travel on graveled and later paved state trunk lines.

Entirely new business activities were the result in East Tawas and other northern communities---from tourist cabins, gasoline service stations and restaurants to real estate offices dealing in recreational land around inland lake areas and Lake Huron.

Development of US-23 through the formerly impassable AuGres swamp of the early days, opened Saginaw Bay frontage to rapid development in the 1930s. A new route of the state trunk line, on the south side of the railroad tracks in East Tawas, was completed in 1931, coinciding with completion of a new bridge across the river at Tawas City. Before the end of the decade, a two-lane concrete highway was extended through Oscoda, replacing the former zig-zag route through Wilber Township. The concrete highway eventually reached Cheboygan.

Early on in this recreational development, the state of Michigan began looking for potential sites for state parks. East Tawas was in an excellent position to reap the benefit, thanks to the foresight of the town officials in 1891. As a provision in the original transfer of property to Emery, the city retained ownership of the site if it was not used for its intended purpose---the manufacture of lumber.

The former mill site became the new East Tawas State Park in 1920 and,

recalling the windfall provided by Mayor Emery, a similar provision was attached to the property when transferred to the state. When the new Tawas Point State Park opened in 1965, the former state park and Community Building reverted to East Tawas and the city park remains as a great financial benefit to the community, as well as a recreational and social site for residents and tourists.

East Tawas has a Main Street, but that street is not the principle business avenue. Newman Street has been the prime business area since the community's earliest days, inasmuch as the Smiths chose to build their store at the south-east corner of the Newman-Bay intersection. The intersection of Main and East Westover was once the location of the stagecoach office operating along the shore prior to advent of the through railroad, as well as two small hotels.

Many changes have taken place along Newman since the original slough was filled with slabs and sawdust in the mid-1860s to eliminate a meandering water course draining from Tawas Lake to the bay.

When the street was excavated in the 1980 for a new sanitary sewer, eliminating one which was combined with a storm sewer, pine slabs, sawdust and a variety of refuse from mills was removed. The street had been slowly sinking with each layer of blacktop surface applied every few years.

When pine plank sidewalks were installed along both sides of the street, pine trees were still growing along the route. The trees were cut off close to the ground and wooden sidewalks constructed over them; when concrete replaced the planks, the stumps were not removed, and discovered more than 60 years later when excavation was made for a new walkway on the east side in front of store buildings, including O'Connors and The Booknook.

Newman Street's face has experienced a substantial facelifting since the white pine days. Only one building at the southwest corner of Newman and State Street would be recognizable to someone from that earlier era. Owned today by the Freel family, it was once known as the Bank Block, but it actually is two buildings. The south end was once the location of a mercantile store owned by H. N. Butler, later by the Hennigars, with an adjacent jewelry store owned by W. B. Murray. The corner building was the

location of the Carson and Ealy Bank, later the Ealy, McKay Bank and then the Peoples State Bank of L. G. McKay.

The second floor was occupied by Michigan Bell Telephone Company for its central office for 70 years, or until 1955 when a new exchange opened on Tawas street. That street originally was called Van Valkenburg, but the founder's name was deemed too long for a new street sign.

## COMMERCIAL FISHING

Commercial fishing, actually the region's pioneer industry dating back to the late 1840s, proved to be one of the stabilizing forces in the Lake Huron shore's economy following the end of white pine lumbering.

East Tawas had three major fishing operators during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, including Lixey Fish Company, Hammel Fishery and the Lake Huron Fish Company of Bayport.

Although prices fluctuated according to supply and demand, there always was a market for the catch and local fishermen worked long hours during season to catch and process the product of their nets. Whitefish, lake trout, yellow pickerel and herring were the major attraction, followed by perch toward the end of the commercial fishing era.

The late Richter Lixey, associated with the family's fishery most of his life, once told an interesting story of his ancestor, Joseph Alex Sodurette, who set his nets in Saginaw Bay in the late 1840s.

Joseph hired several Chippewas from Bay County to help with lifting nets, but they were unable to pronounce his last name. Their confused pronunciation of Joseph's middle name became Alexy. To simplify communication between the boss and his helpers, that name was again modified and the family name of Lixey continues in the fishing business 160 years later.

Henry Lixey joined his father, Joseph, in the fishing business in 1887, and followed it for 50 years; his sons followed in his footsteps. Henry was 90 years of age when he died in 1960, and he had witnessed the peak as well as

the decline of the industry.

By 1933, there were 13 major fisheries along the Saginaw Bay-Lake Huron shore from the south county line to the north line of Iosco. More than 120 men were employed in the business that year. Commercial fishing experienced a rapid decline and almost total death by the late 1940s, followed by sporadic catches for another 20 years. For some, it was difficult to give up a long-established way of life.

## TAWAS BAY BOAT WORKS

In 1934, Gerald Mallon, 22, of East Tawas quit his job as a cabinet maker with the railroad. He was joined by Carl Babcock of Tawas City in the establishment of the Tawas Bay Boat Works.

Both young men, interested in competitive sailing since childhood, leased shore frontage owned by the D&M across from the railroad's engine house at a cost of \$50 per year. Water level of Lake Huron was low and US-23 was not to be widened for another six years, thus providing an ideal location for a new industrial building.

The partners were equipped to construct commercial and pleasure craft up to 70 feet in length and the industrial operation was equipped with a marine railway running out of the shop into Tawas Bay.

The first major project of the shop proved to be one of the most noteworthy of Mallon's long career in the boat business. In May 1935, Mallon laid the keel for a 30-foot six-meter racing sloop for Harold Moeller of Tawas City.

The boat was designed along American Cup Defender lines by Sparkman and Stephens, distinguished New York marine designers. This is some of the correspondence with that firm.

Under the skilled hands of Mallon and his assistants, the plans were carefully translated into a thing of beauty. The Yucatan, as it was called, was the pride of the Tawas Bay sailing fleet, winning the Class A trophy here in 1936 and 1937 regattas, before being lost in a fall storm on Saginaw Bay.

Mallon purchased Babcock's interest in the business and other beautiful sailboats, including National One Design and a new Arrowhead class 22-foot keel boat designed along American Cup Defender lines.

Mallon's business had expanded to a point where new quarters were needed and, with the widening of US-23 through the Tawas, his boat works gave way to highway expansion.

Mallon immediately began construction of a new and larger building to house his business, selecting a site at East Tawas east of the Michigan State Police post. Before work was completed, however, World War II was to intervene in Mallon's boat construction plans

The experienced boat builder became an officer in the US Navy, supervising shipbuilding at Algonac, as well as testing landing craft constructed by Dafoe Boat works at Bay City. He received numerous commendations from the secretary of the navy for his service.

Following World War II, he supervised production of the Chris Craft Corporation's plant at Algonac and never resumed his business at East Tawas. His uncompleted boat works here was later converted into what became the Fox Hotel and later destroyed by fire.

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

With development of its municipal water system in 1887, a volunteer fire department was re-organized at East Tawas. Before that time, fighting fires relied on a more informal volunteer basis.

The city purchased a new two-wheel hose car and four-wheel ladder cart, both drawn by manpower. This equipment was to serve the city until well after World War I.

On display in the Iosco County Historical Museum's collection is a German silver speaking trumpet, won by the department in 1889 during competition at Alpena. The hose and ladder carts have been restored and are on display in one corridor of the new East Tawas Community Center on Newman Street.

Two major fires occurred after 1887, the first in 1905 when flames destroyed the former Holland and Emery store and office building on Newman Street. At the time, the city was equipped with 50 Bourbon Copper and Brass Company fire hydrants, which were frozed and inoperative at the time of the 1905 fire. The hydrants have long since been replaced.

The second major fire came in the mid-1920s when the block between East State and East Westover Streets was destroyed, including the brick Opera House Block with its five store fronts.

Following retirement of the hose and ladder carts, the city purchased a LaFrance Brockway Torpedo hose and ladder truck with chemical tanks. That unit was replaced by a new fire truck after 1938.

Headquarteters of the fire department was long quartered in the two-story city hall on West Westover Street, which featured a hose-drying tower rising above the roofline. That tower had a wooden dome with a Middle East appearance.

Following construction of a new city hall in 1961-62, the fire department moved into the former DPW maintenance building directly to the north of the city hall. The DPW later assumed its present quarters in the former Iosco Road commission building on West Westover.

The fire department accepted delivery on a new fire turck during the winter of 1962, which was replaced shortly thereadrtwer by American LaFrance apparatus.

Today, the well equip<sup>ed</sup>ment fire department is still manned by volunteers, highly skilled in fire fighting as well as in emergency services, all members being state -certified, and housed in a new station on Main Street.

## FISHING PARTY BOATS

In the late 1930s, a new business developed on Tawas Bay---fishing party boats., in addition to the rental rowboat business, for perch fishing. One of the pioneer operators was Gordon Mac Andrew "Captain Mac," in his

Shirley, shown at the East Tawas state dock.

The party boat business flourished each season through the 1940s and 1950s, with an abundant supply of yellow perch to satisfy visitors and locals. MacAndrew was joined by other operators, including Bill DeGrow with his Miss East Tawas, which was later destroyed by fire along with part of the state dock.

In the 1960s, the party boat operators began complaining that commercial fishermen were setting their new nylon gill nets in state-mandated off-limit water of Tawas Bay, almost blocking the bay off from migrating perch, they said.

The battle came to a head between sport and commercial fishermen and unknown persons began destroying gill nets in one or more instances.

Finally, after complaints from sport fishermen, Tawas Chamber of Commerce and local newspaper editorials, Governor George Romney asked the Michigan Department of Conservation to investigate the matter.

In 1965, a public hearing was held at the East Tawas Community Building before a large crowd. Dr. Howard Tanner, head of the state's fish division and father-of the recent introduction of Pacific ocean coho salmon into state waters of the Lake Michigan, was one of those testifying.

Introducing a report contained in another person's doctoral thesis, which had been used in a circuit court case by an attorney for commercial fishermen charged with taking undersized perch, Tanner declared that Tawas Bay perch were short, fat and stunted due to the lack of food. He recommended, and was supported by various state and federal agencies, that size limits on perch in Tawas and Saginaw Bays should be lowered. That action, he said, would reduce the number of stunted perch, as well as benefiting economically depressed commercial operators. At the same time, the state began requiring a sport fishing license on the Great Lake, cashing in on that windfall for an expanded budget.

The party boat business bottomed out in 1966 and disappeared from Tawas Bay, never to return. But, after Tanner's departure from the state, new fish biologists of state and federal agencies became alarmed over the

rapid decline of perch in Saginaw Bay and in the 1970s, after a long fight in the legislature, finally forced removal of gill nets, but allowed trap netting of perch for a specified period. Arrangements were also made for the state to pay for the now unused gill nets and other equipment.

Stocks of perch have never again reached the levels of the 1930-1950 era, probably due to a combination of factors including pollution and over-fishing. Ironically, until establishment of a 50-fish limit, some sport fishermen were even convicted of selling large quantities of Saginaw Bay perch on the commercial market, but others ignored the law and were not prosecuted.

During the past 40 years, water quality of local waters has greatly improved through modernization of sewage treatment facilities and a new form of sport fishing has developed. The Waterways Commission dock at East Tawas is packed each November and December with fishermen seeking to catch spawning white fish on hook and line. As far as it is known, there never had been a sport fishery here for whitefish in past history.