

Sean
HST 302 Professor Fremion
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Case Study

When it came to thinking of the most logical place to do my case study, it was obvious to choose my hometown of Harbor Beach, MI. Harbor Beach has been my home and will always be my true home. To others it may seem like a small rundown town in the middle of “Redneck” county, USA, but there is more than just fields of corn, sugar beets, hay, etc. There is a 2,000-person community where everyone knows everyone, where major crimes such as murder rarely, if ever, occur. With the numerous pine, birch, oak, and apple trees, the woods give home to many wild life and the beachfront gives a beautiful sunrise where the rays of the sun simmer on Lake Huron. At night during Christmas season you witness the light of not only the colorful decorations on the houses, but also the light of the moon reflecting off the powdery snow on the ground. I will go on to explain the history of various places in Harbor Beach where I have significant ties with my life, after which I will discuss what environmental issues surround Harbor Beach today.

Harbor Beach, “the world’s largest man-made (fresh water) harbor”, lies on the eastern shore of Huron County (otherwise known as “The Thumb”). It lies approximately 60 miles north of Port Huron and 17 miles east of Bad Axe. Before Harbor Beach got its name, Harbor Beach, it was originally named the village of Sand Beach. Sand Beach was settled during the mid 1800’s to establish a sawmill. It was in 1910 when the name of Sand Beach was officially changed to Harbor Beach. In a 2010 census, it was recorded

that Harbor Beach had an estimated 1,703 residents within the city limits (Table 1). To get an idea of how many this may exclude I live approximately three to four miles west of Lake Huron and only a mile and a half away from the city limits in a neighborhood of about 30 people on Klug Road. Though back in 1900, most of the houses and buildings that stand today were not built just yet.

From grade school to high school, every summer I made numerous trips to the town beach, Bathing Beach Park. I always will remember using goggles to see what lied beneath the surface of the water (I could never just open my eyes underwater and swim), and attempting to build sand castles. In high school during the summer when conditioning practices for football would roll around, we would be done with four-hour practices drenched in sweat. After we got out at 9 P.M. we would jump off the pier a couple times to cool off, then head home. This beach, which is home to the annual Maritime Festival and many of my childhood memories, was not built until the early 1900's. In Figure 1, it shows downtown Harbor Beach. Where Trescott Street ends is where the pier for Bathing Beach Park should be (Trescott Street is an east-bound road on the bottom of the map).

Another striking characteristic that Figure 1 shows is that the Community House (which lies on the NE corner of Bad Axe Road and Huron Avenue) isn't built yet. The Community House is the builder where the Harbor Beach district library is, that is connected to the Gymnasium and the local movie theatre. The Gymnasium is where I played basketball at when I attended grade school at Our Lady of Lake Huron Catholic School. My grandfather Robert Wood told me when he played for OLLH back in the late

1930s early 40's, there were pillars on the court and you would use them to set picks on the opponents. But those of course were not around in my days. Now the Community House doesn't show up on maps until a July of 1924 map done by *Sandborn-Ferris Maps* (Figure 3), as it lies on the NE corner of the newly named State Road and Huron Avenue.

Figure 2 shows another building missing that is probably one of the important, if not the most important building I have stepped in in all my life, Our Lady of Lake Huron Catholic School. This place has taught me many values and attitudes towards life that I still use today. Some of my old teachers, with whom I hold high respect for, like my mother and Ms. Murdock, still teach there today. The OLLH church is already built and lies on the SW corner of Court and First Street. What should be filling the rest of the block are the school and the church rectory. Figure 5 shows the first section of the school built, which lies on the SE corner of Court and Second Street. Though at this point OLLH is just a high school comprising of four classrooms and beneath it a small auditorium we called the multipurpose room. The rest of the school (which looking at Figure 5 would start at the south end of the school and bend around the corner making an L shape) wouldn't be built until the 40's or 50's. OLLH shut down it's high school in 1960 (I know because my uncle Thomas Wood was the last graduating class) and reopened a couple years later as a Preschool through 8th grade school.

Another interesting aspect I picked up on while inspecting Figure 5 is small but worth noting. At the SE corner of Court and First Street lies the house where the principle of the school lived funded by the church. Mr. Lawrence E. Kish II was my principle K-8th grade, and almost every Saturday after mass my family and I would walk straight across

the road and visit Mr. Kish and his family. Now the aspect I found interesting is that behind the house lies two buildings in which through 13 years of my life I did not know existed. In part because they were bulldozed down and a parking lot sits there today.

When I was in preschool I did not attend OLLH, but instead Zion Lutheran school, because my aunt Paula Wood was the teacher. Because I was there only a year I don't remember much of the halls and vaguely remember the gymnasium, but I do remember how the church was connected to the school. In Figure 6 Zion Lutheran School is correctly located on the NE corner of Garden and 3rd Street, but the church is located across the street, plus the school doesn't extend nearly to the north end of the block like it does today. Just goes to show how much can change over a short period of time. Now I will go on to discuss current environmental matters that involve Harbor Beach, starting with the preservation of our lighthouse.

The Harbor Beach lighthouse was first built in 1858 but first lit 10 years later. The add-ons to the lighthouse to make it as it is today took place in 1968. With ships and boats modernizing with more efficient radar to protect themselves during fogs and storms, lighthouses became more and more useless. But to make sure the lighthouse was maintained and taken care of, the Harbor Beach Lighthouse Preservation Society was formed in 1983. The lighthouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1983, though in the early 2000's the United States Coast Guard "wanted to excess, or get rid of, lighthouses throughout the Great Lakes" (Hoerr). So the HBLPS "stepped into the breach to press for ownership and, simultaneously, restore it" (Hoerr). As of now the

ownership of the Harbor Beach Lighthouse is under the ownership of the city, making the effort by the HBLPS successful.

When it comes to the environment it hasn't been all too perfect in Harbor Beach, as Dow AgroSciences has a factory right on the shore. On September 26th, 2008 a truck leaving Dow spilled what was reported as "non-hazardous material" causing the closure of Huron Avenue for the day to clean up the mess (Langley). The spill took place at approximately 1:45 A.M., the local fire department, the Huron County Road Commission, and officials from Dow responded to the scene in the morning to begin clean-up by dumping sand on the road to soak up the spill, then later in the day the sand would be cleaned up and hauled away (Langley).

Although this incident wasn't very serious at all there was a more alarming matter in which there was contamination in our own little section of Lake Huron. On August 12th, 2008 health officials closed Bathing Beach Park in Harbor Beach after test results found high levels of E. coli in the waters there. "According to the standards used for shallow water beach testing, a beach is closed if the daily geometric mean of the three samples collected in 12 inches of water exceeds 1,000 E. coli colonies per 100 mL of water" (Hessling). Bathing Beach Park was closed due to test results collected Monday (August 11th) revealing 497 E. coli colonies per 100 mL of water (Hessling).

Though in most recent news for the Harbor Beach district, things never could have looked greener, as there has been, what it seems, an exponential growth in the number of wind turbines filling up the sky. In Siegel Township (5 miles west of Harbor Beach) DTE held a dedication ceremony for its first wind park in the thumb on Tuesday,

October 9th of this year, and at the time 31 of the parks 69 wind turbines have been installed (Wolak). Republican Congresswomen, Candice Miller, had this to say about the winds of Harbor Beach during her days of competing in the Bayview Mackinac Boat Race “I’ve raced 29 of them, and I know when you’re coming up the Thumb in the first leg of the race you want to hug the shoreline, particularly around Harbor Beach because of the wind... We really do have some of the best wind, certainly in the country, if not the world. It is appropriate for DTE and others, to take a look at Sanilac, Huron (county Harbor Beach is located), Tuscola, and this whole Thumb area for these wind farms. It is important for us to have this kind of investment in the Thumb area” (Wolak).

A current situation, in which I am pretty excited about, is an overdue make-over, so to speak, on the local bike path and Bathing Beach Park. The project will cost around \$400,000 with \$281,000 coming from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board (Hessling). The project will transform Bathing Beach Park and the 68.5 acres in that vicinity into one large recreational area called the Judge James H. Lincoln Memorial Park, and a separate nature trail that runs north and west of the North Park Campground will be named in honor of Army PFC. Brian J. Backus (who died Father’s Day weekend of 2011 in Afghanistan), the bike path will connect four of the five city parks (Hessling). Judge Lincoln, who passed away July 23rd, 2011, was one of the two people to have a Detroit courthouse named in their honor (the other was another Harbor Beach native, former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Frank Murphy), he presided over more than 30,000 adoptions, the city felt it was appropriate to name the park in his honor because of the countless families and children which will be visiting there (Hessling). In accordance

with naming the bike path after PFC. Backus, Mayor Gary Booms said “Growing up, PFC. Backus was involved in Boy Scouts and eventually became an Eagle Scout. He was an avid hiker and camper, and he spent a lot of time out in the woods in North Park doing mapping as part of the Boy Scouts” (Hessling). PFC. Backus was also the Harbor Beach High School class President of my brother Tom’s graduating class of 2008.

There have been many changes that have happened in the small town of Harbor Beach, MI. I would not have wanted to grow up in any other place. Of course every town has their nuts but most citizens of Harbor Beach are honorable and peaceful, who want nothing more than a hard day’s work then have a little fun with buddies up at Smalley’s Bar and Grill. Where hunting season is in itself a season just like spring, summer, fall, and winter. Where a city backs behind their varsity athletics and always fills the stands, where the landscape and beachfront is as enjoyable as the people who inhabit it. So while Harbor Beach may not be as breath-taking as the Rockies, or as exciting as big city livin’, it’s my home and it was exciting and enjoyable to discover her past.