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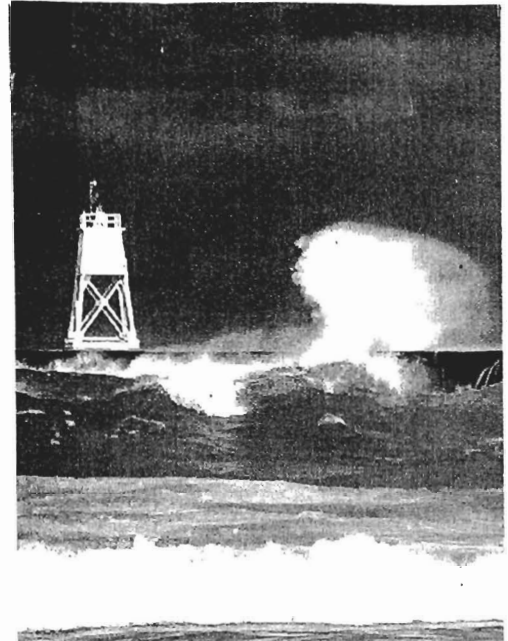
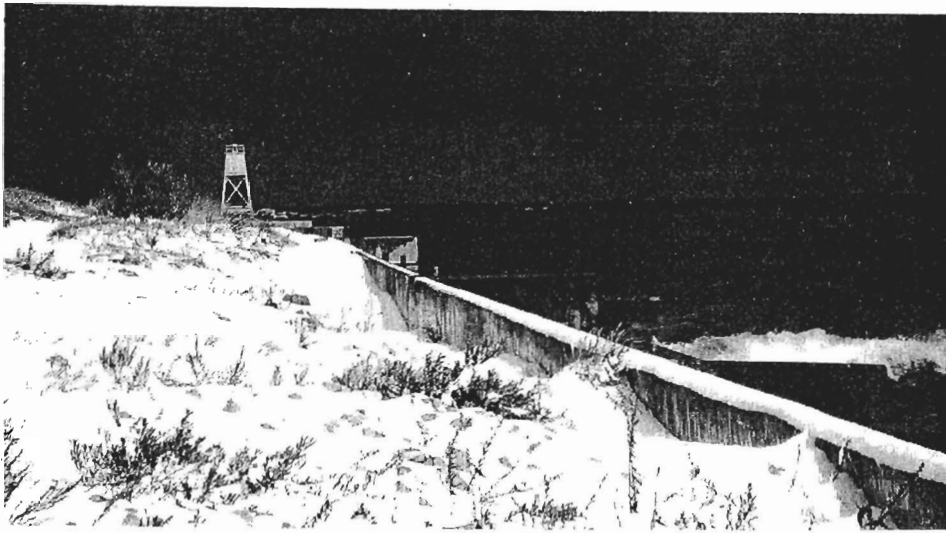
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2007

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## Harbor of Refuge?

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### Harbor of refuge



## Grand Marais petitions for help

On the morning of October 6, 2006, when Willard Handrich, his son Eldon, daughter in law Maggie, and fishing buddy Robert Nyman cleared the nuisance of a sand-choked launch at Grand Marais Harbor in Nyman's 18 foot fishing boat...they had no idea those shifting sands would seal their fate before the sun dropped behind the boundless Lake Superior horizon.

At 1:30 a.m., in the pitch-blackness of the following morning, Robert Nyman was discovered...alone, clinging to the hull of his overturned boat by a U.S. Coast Guard rescue helicopter dispatched from downstate Traverse City.

Nyman would live, but the Handrichs' wouldn't see the sun rise to another day...they had long since slipped beneath the waves...first Maggie, then Eldon, and last, father Willard.

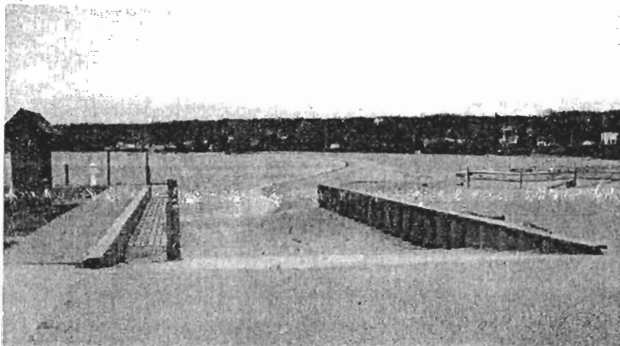
"It was frustrating," stated Burt Township Supervisor, Jack Hubbard as he recounted the events of that day. "Bob's (Nyman) wife Stevie knew they were in trouble when they weren't back in by 2:30 p.m.," he said.

His voice cracking with emotion, Hubbard went on to recount that if it hadn't been for the sand that had been filling the harbor, the Handrichs' and Nyman, wouldn't have been alone out at that productive "honey hole" five miles north of Grand Marais. Because of the sand, most of the other fishermen who would have been out there couldn't launch their boats.

As the word spread that the Nyman boat was in trouble, the

frustration level began to intensify with the realization that neither of the harbor's two Coast Guard vessels, a 26 footer and a 30 footer, could clear the sand at the launch,

view with over 500 signatories of a petition attesting, in part, that the blame for the loss of the Handrich's lay squarely on the shoulders of the U.S. Army Corps of



Sand filling Grand Marais Harbor prohibited the launch of rescue vessels on October 6, 2006.

nor could any of the dozens of local boats that would have responded immediately to go out to help their friends. All they could do was stand at the breakwater... hoping, praying.

At around 4:30 p.m. Willard Handrich's wife phoned Grand Marais Coast Guard Auxiliary man, Howard Baker. He immediately notified the Coast Guard who dispatched a rescue helicopter from Traverse City, as the nearest Coast Guard rescue vessel was moored nearly 90 miles away in Sault Ste. Marie.

By then it was too late. "If our launch-site had been clean," stated Baker, "...I believe that somebody could've gotten out there in time."

Baker and Hubbard share this

Engineers, who, claim the petitioners, first constructed a poorly engineered pile-dike around the turn of the century, and then failed to maintain that dike until it fell to total ruin in the 60's.

In 1950 Grand Marais harbor was authorized as a harbor of refuge by Congressional action. The authorization came with this ironic quote: "The primary justification for improvement is to prevent loss of life and property and to insure safe conditions for an established commerce."

To date, nothing has been done to restore the pile-dike.

As a result of this alleged neglect, the harbor has been filling with sand, which has changed the hydrology of the harbor, causing

**NORTHWEST WINDS off Lake Superior pummel the breakwall at the mouth of Grand Marais Harbor. The harbor is filling with sand which is creating damaging hydrology causing rip currents, boat launch problems, and property loss.**

rip tides and the loss of valuable shoreline property, and not least, the loss of a Grand Marais man not long ago who may have succumbed to the dangerous currents created by the failed breakwater.

The petition, which will be sent to media outlets, the White House, State and Federal representatives, DNR, and the Army corps of Engineers...among others, demands timely remedial action, and begins with, "Once again concerned citizens, visitors, and past residents and their families are fighting to get the Breakwall in Grand Marais repaired or replaced.

"To them (government) it's all about money...," Grand Marais Chamber of Commerce Vice President, Jamie Dowse, "...in 2006 we were appropriated \$1.5 million for the job, but then it was somehow lost from the Bill, now the Army Corps won't lift a finger until we come up with the entire \$6

million needed."

But to the petitioners it's not about money, it's all about the Handrich's.

Among the petitioners' inquiries: "When does loss of life become valuable enough for our government and the Corps of Engineers to finally take responsibility for a problem they created?," and, "Since Grand Marais is a federally designated Harbor of Refuge, how can our government and the Corps of Engineers possibly not be responsible for it's maintenance?"

The big lake is notoriously indiscriminate. For centuries, when dared by mere mortals, Gitchee Gumee has proven to be no respecter of personage, and invariably wins.

The good people of Grand Marais know this, but when it comes to the Oct. 6 tragedy, the family, friends, and neighbors of the Handrichs' aren't inclined to embrace the incident as just another boating accident, and want to make certain it never happens again.

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