

# Remembering When ...

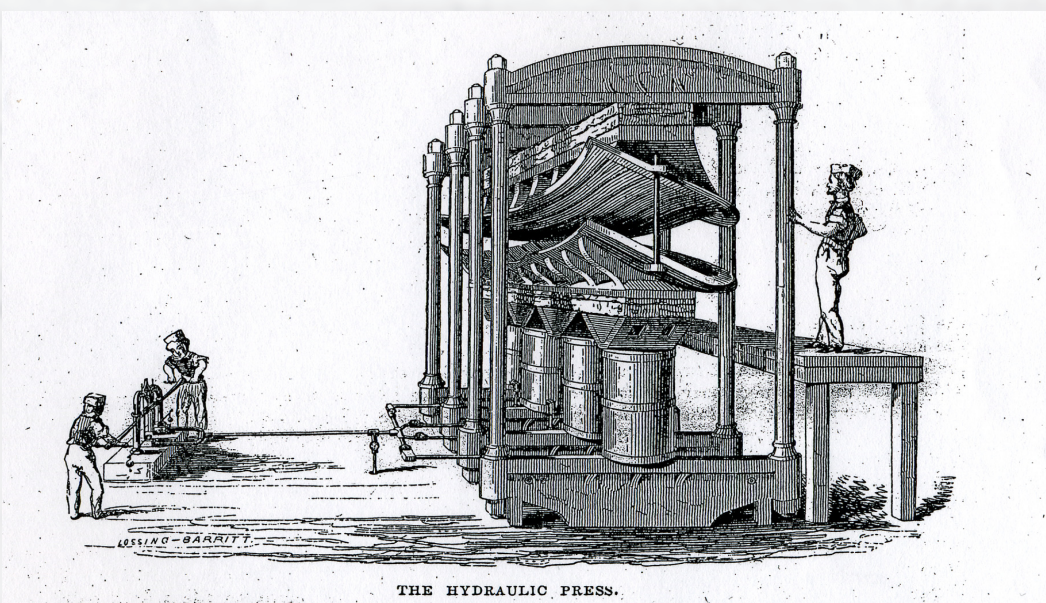
## Our History

### One Old, Old Boat

Currently being restored by members of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society the Francis life-boat- surfboat was delivered to Kalamazoo river lighthouse when Timothy S. Coates (keeper between April 1853 and March 1860) was the keeper. Research of the records of U. S. Life-Saving Service show that the U. S. government purchased and delivered a total of 48 of these boats to Great Lakes locations about 1854.

The old boat has an interesting and unique history. The brain child of inventor Joseph Francis, the Francis boat was a real innovation because the hull was fabricated in pieces from thin steel metal sheets that were form-shaped in a large hydraulic press. The finished parts were then coated with molten tin, then zinc, and riveted together. Due to the unique material – an early form of galvanized metal – today the hull is nearly as sound as when it came out of the press some 150 years ago.

The invention was touted in an article in the 1851 Harpers New Monthly Magazine : “The seams of the metallic boat will never open by exposure to the sun and rain, when lying long on the deck of a ship, or hauled up on shore. Nor will such boats burn. If a ship takes fire at sea, the boats if of iron can never be injured by conflagration. Nor can they be sunk. For they are provided with air chambers in various parts, each separate from the others, so that if the boat were bruised and jammed by violent concussions, up to her utmost capacity of receiving injury, the shapeless



mass would still float upon the sea, and hold up with unconquerable buoyancy as many as could cling to her.”

Attributes were light weight and low maintenance but the boat came at a high cost -- \$475 -- twice what a 1854 worker earned in a year. But the price did not deter the Government from buying the boats for lifeboats and to outfit lifesaving and lighthouse locations.

There is no detailed record of the boats usage here at the Kalamazoo Lighthouse. It was still U.S. Government property when photographed sitting in the sand near the lighthouse by my uncle about eighty years ago.

More on this remarkable piece of our history in next weeks feature! *By Jack Sheridan*



*The Francis boat lies near the Kalamazoo Harbor lighthouse ca 1925*

The Remembering When feature is the creation of Jack Sheridan and Jim Schmiechen of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society. We remind our readers that this year's SDHS Pumphouse Museum exhibit titled “Lincoln's Ready-Made Soldiers: Saugatuck Area Men in the Civil War” is now open. The historic museum is located on the west side of the Kalamazoo River at the foot of Mt. Baldhead. It is open daily, noon to 4 p.m. until Labor Day, and then on fall weekends. There is no admission charge.

In addition, special presentations featuring various historical topics will be presented at the museum on

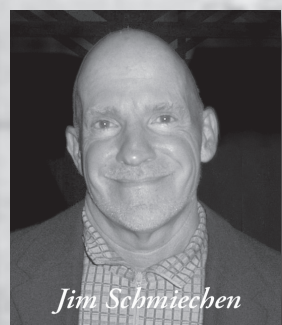
Tuesdays and Saturdays, 11 a.m. to noon, beginning June 21.

We welcome your comments on Remembering When. Call 269 857-7901, email us at [sdhistory@accn.org](mailto:sdhistory@accn.org) or write to Box 617 Douglas, Mi 49406. SDHS historical images can be seen on the SDHS web site at [www.sdhistory.com](http://www.sdhistory.com) and all historical photos are available for purchase in print sizes up to 12x17.

Our historical image database is growing through your contributions. We scan your old photos—you keep the originals—and we then provide you with a CD of your digitized images.



*Jack Sheridan*



*Jim Schmiechen*