

Indian canoes

Michigan Native Americans were skilled canoe makers, lots of water

Three different types of canoes in Michigan:

1 **The birchbark** – where a framework of saplings is covered by sheets of bark from the paperbirch trees. Made farther north where birch grows to a sufficient size – sometimes paddled south. Ojibway or chippewa

2 The **elm bark canoe**, made from one piece of bark from certain elm trees, which were quick to make but didn't last long. iroquois

3. The dugout canoe, made from a single log like this one. **Dugouts** came in many shapes, in general the more pointed ones were pottawatomi

Made in different sizes – in peru kid size – three feet long and a two inch freeboard
Whitemen thought them tippy – and you DID have to pay attention, and the smaller ones couldn't carry much – deer story
and for different purposes – sugar troughs

4 **Pix of our canoe**

Kevin Finney - Man who visited was an expert and had almost agreed to a Tuesday talk, but not quite

He said the canoe was an impressive artifact and said it was pottawatomi, and the 1844 date could be true. One of the things that convinced him was that a piece of loose caulking of cattail fiber and pine pitch, which would work with the era

Michigan dugouts were often made with the Whitewood tree, or Yellow Poplar because it grows tall, straight, free of knots and is soft enough to cut down. But this dugout made from white pine, lighter, and more common in this area.

In the really old days felling the trees was accomplished by fire –

5 **And scooping** out the interior was accomplished by fire. Using stone and shell scrapers– removing the charcoal left behind which impeded further burning.

6 But by 1844 it is likely that the boatbuilder had **metal adze and** scrapers. Smoothness of interior

7 Metal tools made a **smoother finish**

When dugouts were not in use they were liable to crack and shrink, esp if left in sun.

Submerge them in water, or bury them in sand to maintain moisture. In Florida one lake one drained for some reason and they discovered 85 dugouts, in various stages of wholeness, on the bottom.

Under the porch, which figures prominently in the story of this canoe, was not a good place, and accounts for cracks and efforts to remedy them.

Who Made the Canoe?

Attributed to Indian Joe Shashaguay, and tradition had the construction time as 1844 –\

8 **This map shows** Kalamazoo river is the northern tribal boundary between the pottawatomi and the odawa or Ottawa to the north

Even then most didn't live here full time, mostly in winter where would go up rivers into family groups.

Kzoo river Indians used both birchbark and dugout canoes. Birchbarks brought from up north. one old letter I recall mentions the banks of the kzoo where both kinds were

pulled up. The bark canoes were usually larger, could carry more, and more suitable for the uneven waters of lake Michigan.

After the Pottawatomie land was ceded, sold, stolen – whatever – they were forcibly removed west in 1837.

Some went out west and began a new life, some moved to Canada, some went west and came back. And some pretended they were Ottawa. After a while no one was quite sure WHERE they belonged.

Local natives are mostly part of four families, the Shashaguays, the Waugons and the Snays of Saugatuck and the Shagonabys of Allegan.

9 The Shashagua name was first recorded in an Indian **census of 1839**, they were part of a group of Odawa (or possibly covert Pottawatomie) who lived near Allegan in 1835 under the more-or-less leadership of Maksaube. Shashagua was said to be one of Maksaube's three brothers.

Maksaube and Shashagua later moved to the Holland area, where Maksaube even attempted to be elected chief of the village of Ottawa about where pickle factory now is but was unsuccessful losing out to the Waukazoos.

They were part of a mixed band of Ottawa and Pott who were, beginning about 1841, under the wing of George Nelson Smith, a congregational minister who founded a mission in Fillmore township at the extreme northern Allegan county in 1842. The Smith home, centerpiece of the mission still stands on 40th Street,

There was a division in the Ottawa village, some wanted to remain Catholic, others wanted to join Smith and try the Protestant take on Christianity – many of them did both. According to Smith's diary Shashagua, in 1842, had two wives and 8 children. He originally sided with Maksaube in favor of the Catholics, and tried to undermine the ministry of Smith but when Smith's doctoring saved his son, became one of his supporters.

10 Shashagua owned eight acres of land, in Ottawa county north of the mission. **Map** One wife died in 1846, and the number of children varied

After the Dutch arrived in 1847, with no idea of how to live in the land, and no respect for the Indians' possessions and land. They stole their deer, and destroyed their sugaring camps. Discouraged Smith arranged to move his little flock to new lands and in 1849 left for Northport.

But some stayed behind including, we suspect, the Shashagua family – mainly because the patriarch of the family imbibed a little too much firewater and drowned near the mouth of the river April 20, 1848 before the boat left.

At that point the name Shashagua disappears from Indian Census, federal census and we have little idea where the children were.

Now, who actually built the canoe in 1844. First, I suspect that the date we have for construction is not totally correct. We have only the word of trapper Lou Hamlin recollecting his purchase, after more than a half century, when he was probably of advanced years. If he has the name correct, which is problematical, we still don't find him until the 1870 census. Then a number of Indians, of about the right age to be Shashagua's sons begin popping up including one who was honestly named Joe.

11 **1870 census** shows : note I, farmers Snays all born in Canada

Fabien or Fabius snay – early settler

12 1880 Joseph is 45 (30 in 1870) probably living on Indian point, and described as a “hunter” if 45 in 1880 was about 10 when the canoe was built, making him a child prodigy as a boat builder

13 1900 census – shows William married a dutch lady – turned all kids white – became building inspector for the city of Holland – ran the IXL Machine shop, built boats for the navy in Benton harbor during WWII

Boatbuilding continued by the Shags at Saugatuck –

14 John Sr. and son Jim at The Shag Shop on Old Allegan Road, in 1978 built the first **Queen of Saugatuck** – later renamed the Star, in honor of its owners the Starring family.

Using blueprints first **15** drawn for Dick Hoffman’s Island Queens. **Color pix**

Later replaced by a new all-weather boat.

16 In 1983 the shags built the **Harbor Steamer**, same plans, which ran for about 20 years at Grand Haven.

And in 1985 the Silver Queen built for excursions near Pentwater but later moved to Gun Lake at the **17** western edge of Allegan county and called the **Penassee Paddler** later sold to Shreveport, Louisiana.

How did it come to us?

Edgcomb family, another remarkable set of people

First Wm. G. Edgcomb from Lorain, Ohio, 1842 – 1929, one of six brothers,

Served in the navy during the Civil War, aboard the bark Gem of the Sea. Enlisted at 19, in sept 1861 and was honorably discharged at Boston oct of 1862. Came to

Saugatuck in 1864, served as engineer on the **18 Ira Chaffee**, an early steamboat, with Captain Edward Costain, and met Ella Greenalgh of Buffalo who was in Saugatuck visiting her sister, Mrs. Henry Shriver, whose husband owned Riverside Hotel, the building which later became Ox-Bow Inn, the main building at the art school. Married in 1868, William and Ellen resided in Saugatuck for 65 years, except for a few years’ when they lived in Muskegon. Had four children: William, Nellie, Charles and Morgan. Two sons, William and Morgan became Great Lakes captains. Wiliam, the father, died in 1919.

18A Morgan Sr. was born in Muskegon in 1877, but moved to Saugatuck when he was seven years old. Since his father was a great lakes captain he was always interested in boats and in about 1898 contracted with a old area hunter-trapper to purchase his Indian-made dugout canoe, mainly to use for hunting and trapping on the river. We’ll get back to that later.

19 However just a few years later he began a career on the Great Lakes sailed on the **M. F. Butters** and **20** the **Mary McGregor**. Before going to work on the Georgian Bay Line vessels, **Alabama, North American and South American**, all of which he captained at one time or another.

21 At helm During World War II he was commissioned a lieutenant commander and tested boats built in Benton Harbor, taking several down the Mississippi River to turn them over to the Navy. The Snay family was also part of that effort.

Despite all of his years on the lakes, Morgan Sr. according to his obit was “never shipwrecked, although he once spent 15 hours in a heavy sea crossing Saginaw Bay in a storm where several other vessels foundered and sank”.

22– sa at saug 23 24 South American

25 He retired in 1949. **Retired**

He was married to Bessie Smalley, the daughter of William Burdett and Marian Smalley. They have **26 four children**. All four worked on the Georgian Bay boats at one time or another.

William (or Bud) Edgcomb who worked on the Georgian Bay line boats for a while and later captained tugboats at Milwaukee,

The girls, Marian Edgcomb Bale and Jeanne Edgcomb, owned the London Shop in Saugatuck for many years. Jeanne was hostess and program director for the Georgian Bay boats in the summer, and spent the winters as cruise director on the Mississippi River Boat the **Gordon C. Greene**.

Morgan Jr., born in 1923, worked on the Georgian Bay along with the rest of the family, and lots of other Saugatuck-based sailors, and waitresses and deckhands. After graduation from SHS in 1941 he took a job loading coal on a commercial freighter before enlisting in the U. S. maritime Service’s Merchant Marines. And began loading ammunition on a liberty ship headed for France. He later served with the Army infantry during the Korean war, then returned to Saugatuck.

After the last of the Georgian-Bay lines vessels was decommissioned he worked at Chris-Craft In Holland **27** and later Broward Marine. He sailed for **Evel Knievel** for 3 years. Knievel owned about 9 boats of various sizes, He was always the captain by Morg was first mate. They were all named Evel Eye I.

He and his wife, Buzz, who served as stewardess led trips around the world for a number of celebrities.

Now back to the dugout. . .

28 Barechdested in dugout 1956

Morgan Sr. had purchased it about 1898 from Lou Hamlin, a man of the woods type who used it for subsistence hunting and trapping. Hamlin said that it had been built in 1844 by “Indian” Joe shashaguay of the Indian Point Shashaguays. Handcarved from a single log. He sold it to Morgan Sr. for \$3. He used it until he became too busy for the hunting and trapping and retired the old canoe under his porch on Hoffman Street.

At least 20 years later Morg Jr. came home from the Korean War, and drug out the old canoe. It had cracked in several places and, in addition to added caulking had iron supports added to hold it together. He spent many hours on the river in the old canoe, always alone – he felt like it was not stable enough **29** for a passenger, his wife explained. Morg in **canoe**

30 iq launch

He had not taken the old canoe out in several years when in 2004 Edgcomb was diagnosed with cancer, and given only a few days to live entered Hospice in Holland. There they stabilized his health making him much more comfortable. Morg began

longing to sit in the old canoe just once more, and his fellow firemen from Saugatuck thought the request reasonable. – newspaper story said the canoe had been on loan to the sd historical society, but that is not true.

The Central Wesleyan church near the Hospice had a tiny pond, and they brought the old canoe to the bank of the pond and went over to the hospice to get Morg. They blindfolded him and led him downstairs and helped him into the canoe, which was still on the bank with the bow in the water where **31** he happily posed for pictures. **morgan in dugout at nursing home**

32 Morgan Jr. died October 30, 2004, and the fire department named a new fireboat the **Morgan J.** in his honor.

After his death the family and the firemen gifted the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society with the ancient historic vessel, and it became part of their new exhibit, just hours before it opened in May.

Footnote: Charles Lorenz, one of the founding members of the society, became so fascinated with the story that in 1984 he, and others, purchased the Old Wing Mission turning it into a Bed and Breakfast. And began work, only recently finished, of transcribing some of the Smith diaries.

Dugout Tuesday talk cd

1-drawing birchbark canoe

2-drawing elm bark canoe

3- sheet of drawings dugout canoes

4- three pictures of our canoe, put all three on same image if you can easily.

I will forward as an email from James Schmiechen – subject: canoe, originally sent 5/26/11

5- drawings of Indians burning inside of dugouts

6- drawings of scooping out tools

7- photos, use left part of sheet only. Smooth insides with metal tools

8- map of Indian land cessions

9- Indian census ca 1838-1839

10- map of Old wing mission Indian tracts

11- detail of the 1870 census. I will forward as an email from cyoder subject: re shashagud and eney, originallhy sent 7/31/11

12- 1880 census, crop please if you can without too much work

13- 1900 census, crop as marked if it is not an arduous task.

14- black and white photo, launching of the Queen of Saugatuck

15- color pix, queen of Saugatuck

16 b&w Harbor Steamer

17 b&w Penassee Paddler

18- b&w Ira Chaffee

18A- CaptEdgcomb – cyoder email 8/8/11 12:39

19 b&w Marshall F butters

20 Large b&w photo of three boats

21 b&w Captain Edgcomb with North American behind

22 b&w boats docked next to big pavilion

- 23- color postcard south American docking at Mackinac
- 24- color postcard South American in Sault locks.
- 25 Saugatuck Captain Retires – newspaper clipping
- 26- Edgcomb children – cyoder email 8/8/11 12:44
- 27- EvelKnieval – cyoder email 8/8/11 12:45 (use the picture of Morg and the curly headed man in the lower left hand corner pouring a beer – the others are of Evel’s son.)
- 28- Dugout pictures-1 - cyoder email 8/8/11 12:39 Clipping from Detroit News, include text to the right.
- 29- Morg in canoe. This is the one you scanned earlier. Let me know if you still have it or need me to send again.
- 30- Large b&w of Morg at Island Queen launch
- 31- Morgan and dugout at nursing home - cyoder email 8/8/11 12:37
- 32- Fireboat – cyoder email 8/8/11 12:47