



CONTACT: Dominick Miller
millerd44@michigan.gov
Mackinac State Historic Parks
Phone: 231.436.4100
www.mackinacparks.com

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Memorial Day Observance to Honor Fallen Fort Mackinac Soldiers at Post Cemetery

MACKINAC ISLAND, MICH.—Mackinac State Historic Parks will hold a brief and informal Memorial Day Observance on Monday, May 31, 2021 at 8:30 a.m., beginning behind Fort Mackinac at the Avenue of Flags and heading to the Fort Mackinac Post Cemetery.

“When we started interpreting this time period (the 1880s) we thought it would be an appropriate thing to do,” said Phil Porter, Mackinac State Historic Parks Director Emeritus.

As Porter researched the 1880s, he discovered the Fort Mackinac soldiers halted service for the first time in 1883, when Captain Edwin Sellers suspended duty and held a Decoration Day, now Memorial Day, ceremony. According to Porter, Mackinac State Historic Parks began practicing the Memorial Day Observation ceremony more than 20 years ago as a result of the new interpretation of the 1880s U.S. soldier.

“I think [the ceremony] is really special because our costumed interpretive staff does exactly what the soldiers, who they represent, did 130–140 years ago when this all started—that’s an exciting thing,” said Porter. “And it’s a way for our soldiers, today, to pay tribute to those soldiers in the past who died while in service at Fort Mackinac and are buried on the island at the Post Cemetery.”

Porter said he looks most forward to the march to the Post Cemetery. The soldiers muffle the drums as soldiers in the 1880s would for a funeral or similar service and perform a cadence. According to Porter, if you didn't know what year it was, you could either be in the 1880s, or today.

“It's kind of early in the morning and, even when it's foggy, it's just kind of cool,” said Porter.

Costumed Interpreters will lead attendees from Fort Mackinac to the Post Cemetery and perform a short ceremony and salute. Current Mackinac State Historic Parks Director Steve Brisson will speak at the ceremony while interpreters lay a wreath on Captain Edwin Sellers' grave. Afterwards, soldiers will fire a rifle salute followed by “Taps” played by a bugler. Afterwards, the procession will march back to Fort Mackinac.

Mackinac State Historic Parks, a family of living history museums and parks in northern Michigan's Straits of Mackinac, is an agency within the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Its sites—which are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums—include Fort Mackinac, the Biddle House, The Richard and Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, Historic Downtown Mackinac, and Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park and Michilimackinac State Park in Mackinaw City. Mackinac State Historic Parks is governed by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, established in 1895 to protect, preserve and present the parks' rich historic and natural resources for the education and recreation of future generations. Visitor information is available at (231) 436-4100 or online at www.mackinacparks.com.

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