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Mackinac State Historic Parks Opening for the 2025 Season

MACKINAW CITY, MICH. — As opening day approaches, the Mackinac State Historic Parks team is hard at work protecting, preserving, and presenting the rich history of the Straits of Mackinac by creating new exhibits, galleries, and tours, improving visitor experiences, celebrating a major anniversary, expanding our collections area and library, and finishing major infrastructure improvements on Mackinac Island.

“As we prepare to open for 2025 our dedication to preserving these awesome treasures remains steadfast,” said Steve Brisson, Mackinac State Historic Parks Director. “From completing numerous infrastructure projects to debuting new programs and exhibits, we look forward to welcoming guests to our historic sites and parks to share in the wonder of Mackinac.”

Fort Mackinac, on Mackinac Island, opens first for the 2025 season, on May 2. The three Mackinaw City sites follow the next week – Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse May 6, Colonial Michilimackinac May 7, and Historic Mill Creek May 8. Historic Downtown Mackinac finishes opening week on May 9.

2025 marks 150 years since the creation of Mackinac National Park. On March 3, 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant signed the park into law, creating the second national park in the United States, three years after Yellowstone. This act set aside more than 50% of Mackinac Island for the enjoyment of the

public, where they could enjoy the island's natural beauty and historical significance. It was the creation of the national park that set the stage for the Mackinac Island we know and love today.

"This anniversary gives us an opportunity to reflect on how the establishment of the national park laid the foundation of a legacy that continues to the present," Brisson said.

This season-long celebration includes a daily program at Fort Mackinac, introducing the rise of tourism on Mackinac Island and how the island and fort have been preserved. Check our website for times. A new original documentary, *A Pride of Purpose: The Story of Mackinac National Park*, will play throughout the day in the Soldier's Barracks Theater. Special events, including walking and biking tours into the original Mackinac National Park, will highlight the introduction of the park, the soldiers who cared for it, the historic cottages and park leases, and the natural features that were deemed so important to protect.

At Fort Mackinac, the 1859 Soldier's Barracks is being renovated and restored throughout, and will debut new, exciting exhibits for the 2025 season. The theater will be moved to the restored second floor Chapel, showing both *The Heritage of Mackinac* and *A Pride of Purpose: The Story of Mackinac National Park*, rotating throughout the day. New or updated exhibits include:

- *Mackinac, An Island Famous in These Regions*: updated for 2025, this comprehensive exhibit presents the complete history of Mackinac Island. It tells the story of how Mackinac Island evolved through the centuries and will focus on the various people who helped Mackinac grow into a major tourist destination: Anishnaabek fishermen, British soldiers, American fur traders, adventurous travel writers, enterprising hoteliers, national park visitors, and 21st century tourists. This exhibit is located throughout the first floor of the building.
- *A Desirable Station: Enlisted Soldiers at Fort Mackinac, 1884-1890*: Interprets the lives and duties of the enlisted soldiers stationed at Fort Mackinac in the 1880s. Using one of only three known historic photos of Fort Mackinac's interiors as a guide, this exhibit will blend a traditional gallery space with a period setting representing a barracks squad room in the late 1880s.

- *A Military History of Fort Mackinac*: This exhibit covers the construction, conflicts, and changing fortunes of Fort Mackinac between 1779 and 1895.

Finally, the restrooms inside the Soldier's Barracks will be completely remodeled and modernized. Portions of the building will be ready for opening day May 2, while other exhibits will phase open throughout the season.

On top of the national park program, guests to Fort Mackinac can expect the classic Cannon and Rifle Firing Demonstrations, in addition to walking tours focusing on the Hospital Corps at Fort Mackinac, the people who lived and worked at the fort, a Guard Mount Program, a Dress Parade Program, and the popular Drill Activity on the Parade Ground.

The Tea Room at Fort Mackinac, operated by Grand Hotel, will feature new menu items for the 2025 season, and, as always, will feature one of the most stunning views in Michigan. Perhaps the way to make a Fort Mackinac visit most memorable is firing the opening cannon salute, which is available to one guest daily.

The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, located in Marquette Park in front of Fort Mackinac, will feature *Iconic Mackinac*, a juried exhibition in the second-floor changing gallery. 150 years ago the many icons of Mackinac Island prompted the creation of Mackinac National Park. This protected icons such as Fort Mackinac, Fort Holmes, Arch Rock, Sugar Loaf and others, and spurred the creation of icons such as Grand Hotel and the East and West Bluff Cottages.

An art attendant will lead guided tours of the galleries, including a look at Native American art on Mackinac, and the works of photographer William Gardiner. In addition, the attendant will lead two "Kids' Time" crafts in the lower-level art studio.

Additionally, nine artists-in-residence will stay on Mackinac Island throughout the summer. Each artist will host a special, free program on the second Wednesday of their residency.

Elsewhere on Mackinac Island, the Biddle House, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, shares the continuing store of the Anishnaabek on Mackinac Island, will feature a new daily program: *Hosting at the Biddle House: Networking Through Food and Family*. This program

will show how the Biddle House became a point of cultural exchange between European food culture and traditional Anishinaabe business and familial ties on Mackinac Island in the 1830s.

The Benjamin Blacksmith Shop, located next door to the Biddle House, is a working blacksmith shop that dives into the 1950s and the changing culture of workers on Mackinac Island. The American Fur Co. Store & Dr. Beaumont Museum and McGulpin House have both received new exhibits in the past three years. Admission to all of these sites is included with a Fort Mackinac or Historic Downtown Mackinac ticket.

The Biddle House, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, Benjamin Blacksmith Shop, and The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum open for the 2025 season on May 9. The McGulpin House and American Fur Co. Store & Dr. Beaumont Museum open June 7.

“Guests can expect exciting things at Fort Mackinac and Historic Downtown in 2025, between old staples like cannon firings and our new foodways program at the Biddle house,” said Jack Swartzinski, Interpretation Coordinator for Fort Mackinac and Historic Downtown Mackinac. “Our interpreters are excited to re-open the historic sites and share their knowledge and passion with our guests.”

Special events at Fort Mackinac and Mackinac Island include the Fort2Fort Five Mile Challenge May 10; the annual Vintage Base Ball game July 26; special activities for July 4; special history evening programs including a guided tour of Historic Downtown Mackinac as it would have looked in the 1830s and a tour highlighting the creation of the village of Mackinac Island; a walking tour of the Mackinaw Mission; special nature and birdwatching tours; night sky programs at Fort Holmes and Arch Rock; bike tours looking at Mackinac’s forgotten features and the War of 1812; the Mackinac National Park: 150 events; and much more. More information can be found at mackinacparks.com/events.

Moving to Mackinaw City, the Colonial Michilimackinac Visitor’s Center, located under the Mackinac Bridge, has been completely remodeled and renovated. This renovation will improve guest services immensely, allowing for a central service counter that will handle admissions to Colonial Michilimackinac, checkout for the museum store, and information space for general inquiries. Restrooms

have been added, while the existing building near the parking has become storage. The museum store has been completely redesigned, and a small porch has been added to the east of the building, facing the park. All windows and doors have been replaced, making the space more energy efficient, while HVAC is been added to heat and cool the building.

Staying at Michilimackinac, the year 1775 will be explored, as Michilimackinac was an outpost on the edge of the British empire. The revolutionary events of 1775 directly impacted and altered the lives of everyone at Michilimackinac, despite their geographical isolation. A daily program at 12:30 p.m. will explore this topic throughout the 2025 season. Michilimackinac 1775: Outpost on the Edge also kicks off the multi-year celebration of America: 250, the national recognition of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Other programs throughout the day explore the rich history of the site and showcase how it was more than a military outpost. Discover the various people who called Michilimackinac home and discuss their lives and work with them; learn about the enslaved individuals who lived and worked at the Straits; explore the more than 5,500 square feet of gardens with guided tours; and, of course, feel the power of Michilimackinac's weapons with musket and artillery firings.

"2025 at Colonial Michilimackinac will mark the celebration of 1775. Programs and activities will focus on the first "official" year of the American Revolution and how the events of the world impacted the business, military, and civilian community at Mackinac," said LeeAnn Ewer, Curator of Interpretation. "There was a full, vibrant and busy community at Michilimackinac in 1775, and I hope guests can come and explore. Each person will find something uniquely interesting."

The Mackinac State Historic Parks' archaeology program will enter its 67th season in 2025. Work will continue in House E of the Southeast Rowhouse at Colonial Michilimackinac. Archaeologists will be out daily (weather permitting) during the summer months. Guests are encouraged to visit "Treasures from the Sand," our premiere archaeological exhibit, to see what archaeologists have uncovered over the years.

Want to get closer than ever to the action at Colonial Michilimackinac? Guests have two opportunities to fire black powder weapons: an opening cannon blast, at 9:30 a.m., or they can fire the full complement of weapons at Guns Across the Straits. Reservations for either program can be made by calling (231) 436-4100. More information can be found [here](#).

Special events at Colonial Michilimackinac include exhilarating “Fire at Night” programs, deep dives into Michilimackinac’s maritime history, a celebration of the King’s Birth-day on June 4, a look at Askin’s People at Michilimackinac in August, a moonlit Michilimackinac evening, the ever-popular Fort Fright, and A Colonial Christmas. More information can be found at mackinacparks.com/events.

Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, across the park from Colonial Michilimackinac, will see the continued restoration of the site to its 1910 appearance, a continuing project for more than 25 years. The flagpole will return to the house in 2025, flying a 1910-era (46 star) flag. In recent years small details have been added back to the site, including reconstruction of the oil house and privy, a water pump, and the restoration of the second floor of the house. Demonstrations of the Fog Whistle happen throughout the day, while tours of the lighthouse tower allow you to see the Straits from a new perspective.

“The small details are what make Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse special,” Ewer said. “The gorgeous setting and beautiful restoration of the Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse is worth a visit for everyone that comes to Mackinaw City.”

Programs at Historic Mill Creek feature daily demonstrations of a reconstructed 18th century sawmill. With the smell of fresh sawdust in the air, the awesome power of the water never fails to impress as the mill springs to life, fed by the pond and ever-flowing currents of Mill Creek. Log hewing and pitsaw demonstrations will be relocated near the millpond, providing easier access and shaded seating for visitors of all ages. At the workshop historic farming programs highlight what life was like beyond the sawmill more than 200 years ago.

“Visitors to Historic Mill Creek will enjoy several new experiences in 2025. Improvements to our water-powered sawmill will have our main attraction running smoothly during hourly demonstrations. A new daily program, “Tools of the Trade,” will highlight farming, grist milling, woodworking, and other

daily activities which took place at the site in the 1830s,” said Kyle Bagnall, Park Naturalist. “Nature programs also occur daily, featuring local wildlife, blooming wildflowers, and other North Woods residents. Don’t miss new “Wonders of Water” activities at the Mill Pond, and join the search for fish, frogs, and other aquatic residents in our most amazing ecosystem!”

During the summer months, special themed weeks will dig deeper into the story of Historic Mill Creek. From June 21-29, enjoy “Wildlife Week at Historic Mill Creek,” featuring the amazing animals of the North Woods. From July 19-27, enjoy “Hay Cutters & Summer Pasture,” as programs explore historic hay making at the Straits of Mackinac. Finally, August 23-31 will feature “Lost Rocks & Mackinac Millstones,” where guests will learn about the grist mill at Mill Creek, and how the Mill Creek millstones were hewn from “lost rocks” deposited by glaciers thousands of years ago.

On the wild side, Historic Mill Creek’s 3.5 miles of interpreted hiking trails are always open and available to explore. During the summer months, join a trained naturalist at various times of the day for a guided walk along the trails, looking for blooming wildflowers, fruiting fungi, and singing birds among the trees, as well as for any wildlife along the banks of Mill Creek.

Mackinac State Historic Parks maintains a robust publications program, with more than 100 titles published. 2025 will continue this tradition with the scheduled publication of two books, with a third in development. An Arch Rock pictorial souvenir book will be available at the start of the 2025 season, while a vignette about the sloop *Welcome* will come later in the season.

Every museum store will feature new items inspired by the site they represent. The Official Mackinac Island State Park Store, inside the Mackinac Island State Park Visitor’s Center, will continue to have new items inspired by the historic and natural elements of Mackinac Island.

Most major projects were funded, in part, by Mackinac Associates. Visit mackinacparks.com for a complete listing of updates and projects at Mackinac State Historic Parks, hours of operation, daily events, special events, and more.

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, featuring the Mackinac Island Native American Museum, Benjamin Blacksmith Shop, The Richard & Jane Manoogian Mackinac Art Museum, American Fur Co. Store & Dr. Beaumont Museum, McGulpin House, and Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac, Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, Historic Mill Creek, 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 on the web at www.mackinacparks.com.

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