

Michigan Every Day
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Sept. 20, 1873
First glow from St. Helena Island Lighthouse

Situated in Lake Michigan, just west of the straits of Mackinac, St. Helena Island had long been a stopover on the trade route between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. While the island was an inviting place to take refuge from storms and to stock up on supplies, dangerous shoals in the path to the island also made navigation perilous. After several ships wrecked on the shoals, Congress authorized funds to pay for a lighthouse on the island. Work was completed in the summer of 1873 and, upon the arrival of a Fresnel lens ordered especially from France, the beacon was lit on Sept. 20, 1873. Over the years the number of people who made their living on the island dwindled, and the lighthouse was automated in 1922. The lighthouse then fell into disrepair. The property was restored by the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association and in 2001 the entire island was purchased by the little Traverse Conservancy.