

Michigan Historical Marker for Big Rock Point Site

By Tim Petrosky

Consumers Energy, the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, and Michigan Historical Commission officials recently unveiled a state historical marker at G. Robert Adams Roadside Park east of Charlevoix. The marker honors the achievements of the Big Rock Point nuclear plant and the significance of the area to the Odawas. The Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians has more than 4000 tribal citizens and provides governmental services from its offices in Harbor Springs, Michigan.

“Big Rock Point and its employees were pioneers in demonstrating that nuclear energy could safely and efficiently generate electricity,” said Jackson L. Hanson, Consumers Energy’s vice president of generation, engineering, and services. “The outstanding safety record and the

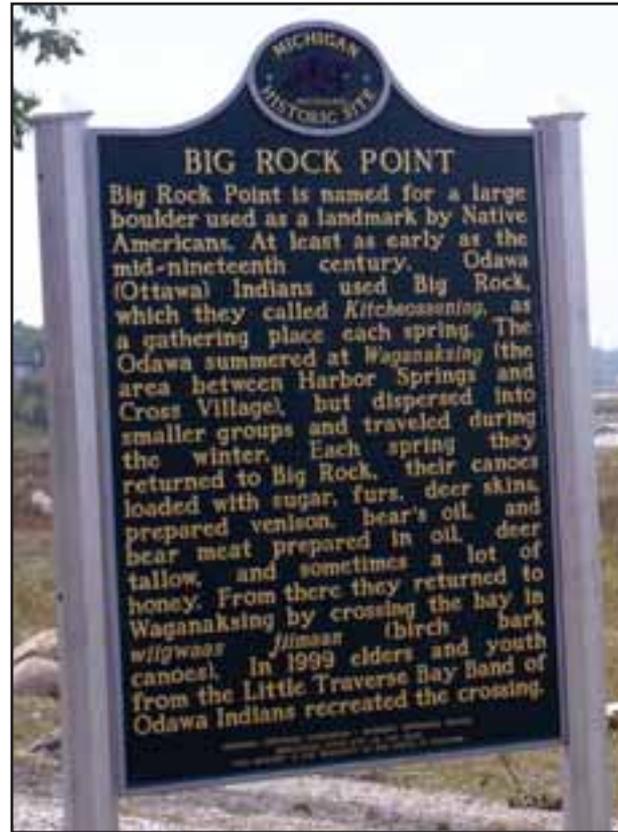
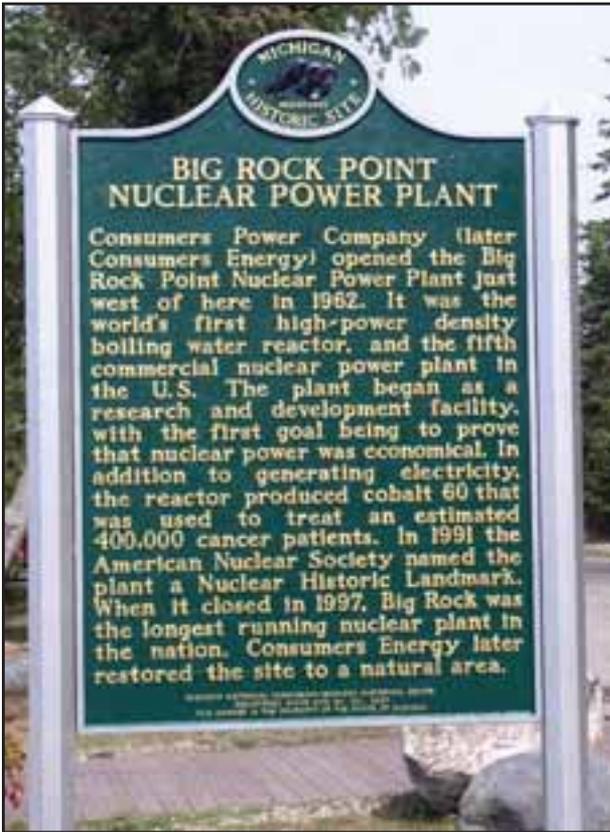
State historical marker installed honoring Big Rock Point nuclear plant and Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.

research that was conducted at the plant helped set the standard for the commercial nuclear power industry that was to follow.”

The plant set several industry records throughout its



Dignitaries gather to dedicate the historical marker at the Big Rock Point site: (left to right) Dave Miles, Charlevoix Historical Society; Tim Petrosky, Consumers Energy area manager; State Rep. Kevin Elsenheimer; State Sen. Jason Allen; Jack Hanson, Consumers Energy vice president; Tom Truscott, Michigan Historical Commission; Frank Ettawageshik, chairman of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians; and Ethel Knepp, Hayes Township supervisor.



The two sides of the historical marker.

operating life from 1962 to 1997 and was named a Nuclear Historic Landmark for its contributions to the nuclear and medical communities. The site was decommissioned, and on January 8, 2007, Consumers Energy received approval from the U.S. Nuclear Energy Commission to release for unrestricted use 435 acres of the Big Rock Point nuclear plant property.

“This location among many others on Little Traverse Bay is part of the tapestry of historical and cultural significance for our tribal people,” said Frank Ettawageshik, tribal chairman of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. “The marking of our tribal sense of place enhances the appreciation of this region for tribal citizens

and local residents, and visitors as well.”

“The Michigan Historical Marker program educates the public about the richness of Michigan’s past. This marker, which brings together the traditions and history of the Odawa people with the late twentieth century activities at the Big Rock nuclear power plant, is unique,” said Laura Ashlee, who coordinates the Michigan Historical Marker program.

Also participating in the dedication ceremonies were Dave Miles, from the Charlevoix Historical Society; Ethel Knepp, Hayes Township supervisor; State Sen. Jason Allen; and State Rep. Kevin Elsenheimer. Miles noted that the Big Rock Point nuclear plant brought national and in-

Text of the State Historical Marker

BIG ROCK POINT NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Consumers Power Company (later Consumers Energy) opened the Big Rock Point nuclear power plant just west of here in 1962. It was the world’s first high-power density boiling water reactor and the fifth commercial nuclear power plant in the United States. The plant began as a research and development facility, with the first goal being to prove that nuclear power was economical. In addition to generating electricity, the reactor produced cobalt-60 that was used to treat an estimated 400 000 cancer patients. In 1991 the American Nuclear Society named the plant a Nuclear Historic Landmark. When it closed in 1997, Big Rock was the longest running nuclear plant in the United States. Consumers Energy later restored the site to a natural area.

BIG ROCK POINT

Big Rock Point is named for a large boulder used as a landmark by Native Americans. At least as early as the mid-nineteenth century, Odawa (Ottawa) Indians used Big Rock, which they called *Kitcheoskening*, as a gathering place each spring. The Odawa summered at *Waganaksing* (the area between Harbor Springs and Cross Village) but dispersed into smaller groups and traveled during the winter. Each spring they returned to Big Rock, their canoes loaded with sugar, furs, deer skins, prepared venison, bear’s oil, and bear meat prepared in oil, deer tallow, and sometimes a lot of honey. From there they returned to *Waganaksing* by crossing the bay in *wiigwaas jiimaan*, birch bark canoes. In 1999 elders and youth from the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians recreated the crossing.



The achievement landmark, dedicated specifically to the achievements of the Big Rock Point nuclear plant and its employees, incorporates pieces of the plant's containment steel.

ternational recognition to the small city of Charlevoix and that more than 2500 people toured the historical society's plant exhibit last year. Sen. Allen and Rep. Elsenheimer presented company representatives with a special tribute honoring plant achievements and the significance of the site to the Odawas.

The historical marker is located in the Adams Roadside Park on Lake Michigan, four miles east of Charlevoix. Visitors to the park can glance a short distance across the bay and view the former location of the nuclear plant and

Kitcheossening, the big rock after which the plant was named.

BIG ROCK ACHIEVEMENT LANDMARK

In addition to the State of Michigan Historical Marker, former Big Rock Point employees Pam Gibson and Tracy Goble unveiled a landmark during the August 25 event dedicated specifically to the achievements of the nuclear plant and its employees. The landmark is located near the entrance to the former nuclear plant access road and commemorates the realization of the dream that nuclear energy could safely and reliably produce electricity, as well as the fulfillment of the company's promise to return the site to a natural state.

The landmark incorporates pieces of the plant's containment steel and was designed to blend into the pristine northern Michigan environment. It was funded entirely by donations from employees and business friends of the plant. ■



Local citizens and former employees view the Big Rock Point achievement marker at an August 25 celebration.

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