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EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

Quick, Timely Reads
On the Waterfront

Fish Hawk Finesse
On the Waterfront Origin Stories and
Theoretical Underpinnings

By David Frew, Scholar in Residence
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An Osprey, or fish hawk, approaches its nest

The very first essay in the “On the Waterfront” series was titled “[How Does the Osprey Know?](#)” It chronicled the amazing intelligence and dexterity of a beautiful bird that has become a regular at Presque Isle State Park as well as an interesting “coincidence.” Each year when the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission delivers its regular truckload of hatchery trout to Presque Isle’s Waterworks twin settling ponds, osprey have been there waiting. In that first essay of this series, I inquired about how the birds knew that such a delectable and easy meal was being delivered each year.

The fish release happened again this year (2025), and as usual, ospreys were waiting in the trees to share in the bounty of newly released trout. And this year, there were more ospreys than ever before. I now understand why their numbers have increased. Osprey fly to Presque Isle each spring to establish breeding nests and have babies, and most years they have successfully raised and fledged youngsters. Each fall, Presque Isle’s osprey families fly south with the female leaving first and the male and fledglings following a few weeks later. Since osprey diets are about 95% fish, they must abandon the northern breeding grounds before the water freezes.

Southern migration is daunting. Presque Isle’s osprey fly as far south as Central America each year and then back. Assuming both legs of the migration go well, the following season will mark the return of the original male and female as well as their offspring. Local estimates have the current population of osprey at Presque Isle is estimated to be between 10 and 14.

SONS of Lake Erie members were on-hand at Waterworks as usual this year to show kids how to fish, provide poles and bait, and serve lunch. I chuckled when the follow-up SONS newsletter noted that while delighted kids caught lots of trout, the osprey did as well. The SONS article noted that the swooping and diving osprey seemed to delight the kids as much as the fishing. The newsletter also captured a great photograph of osprey diving at Waterworks.

Watching this year’s osprey event symbolized for me a major transition that happened during COVID and the pivot that Jefferson Educational Society made to continue providing services to its members. As the pandemic impacted most of what we were all doing, a virtual brainstorming meeting at JES addressed the question of how we could proceed with programming. That was when someone wondered if a few of us “scholars” might be able to begin essay series. I confidently volunteered but then began to wonder what I might write about and how I would be able to find weekly topics that would both be appealing and valuable. Plagued by self-doubt, I drove to Presque Isle where the fish commission was releasing trout. As I watched the acrobatic osprey, feasting on government fish, I decided that I would begin with what I was seeing that day. It combined my happy place, Presque Isle, with large birds: a long-time fascination. I have always loved raptors.

A draft of that first essay flowed easily but then self-doubt reared its ugly head. I am certainly not a bird expert. I had to do some research. And I wondered where the inspiration for other essays might be. How many of these were in me?



The Roger Torey Peterson Institute in Jamestown, New York

Research began with a field trip to Jamestown, New York, and the Roger Tory Peterson Center. Amazingly, the Peterson Center was simultaneously offering exhibits on the osprey, marine biologist Rachel Carson, and DDT pesticide. This led to at least three additional essay topics, including an homage to Peterson himself. One visit to the Peterson Center did not qualify me as a raptor expert, but it did make me confident enough to complete the first essay, and it provided a basic plan for three more.

When the first essay appeared, a second and totally unanticipated “new-topic fountain” literally exploded on my laptop. Readers who read the osprey essay responded with creative new suggestions. The first feedback comment suggested that I write about Pymatuning Reservoir, which happily led to another field trip as well as several new topics, including the Erie to Beaver Canal, which passed right through that part of the world. Another reader responded with a recommendation that I do essays about the Lake Erie blue pike and commercial fishing. Suddenly, I had so many potential essays that I couldn’t write them all. Not a bad problem.

As essays started rolling out, I knew that I should try to contextualize and connect them. A general theme was needed. The best early guidance came from Pat Cuneo, who came up with the heading, “On the Waterfront.” Brilliant! Our thinking about the thrust of the essay topics was to integrate Erie history (and beyond) with

nostalgia, an approach that I had been practicing in much of the writing that has characterized my latest books. That writing uses inside-out history and draws heavily on nostalgia.

Inside-Out History... My approach to teaching history is that it should be told as it is typically experienced by children as they are growing up. Rooted in place and extended in scope to ever larger geographic and social contexts. Kids learn about their own front yards and neighborhoods first and slowly expand their experiences to the larger world as they grow older. At least they did during the 1950s before well-intentioned parents began to orchestrate children's lives, filling time with activities and lessons. As kids got older and more confident, they stretched geographic boundaries, finding significant lessons in their expanding geographic travels, including buildings, churches, landmarks, and more. That expanded their observations from close-by features to larger understandings of national and world affairs. They learned about politics, immigration, wars, and world events by connecting them to neighborhood matters. While this may seem to be an inside-out way to learn history and geography, and it does not correlate with planned lessons packed into grade school textbooks, it is (or was) a common and natural way to learn.

Nostalgia... If the first theme in this series is "inside-out history," lessons that most of us learned by moving from the micro to the macro, a second theme will continue to be "nostalgia." Psychology has reversed its general thinking about this phenomenon in recent years. Once imagined as a negative defense mechanism difunctionally used for balancing cognitive dissonance, the general view of nostalgia these days is quite positive. Either as a personal or a social act of recalling older and simpler times, nostalgia can be used to improve self-esteem and to elicit positive emotions. The general theme in this essay series is a focus on the 1950s, a simpler time when family and the importance of core values seemed to take precedence over modern values such as social media. In several laboratory studies, psychologists have demonstrated the positive use of nostalgia for reducing depression and anxiety. Naturally, the link between imagined past events and "reality" is tenuous at best, but regardless, nostalgia can be used to stimulate positive emotions.

More than four years have passed since that first essay appeared in 2020, and the topics continue to pour in and out. Reader suggestions have been the source of lots of them and as planned the dual themes of simple inside-out history and nostalgia continue to please. With the help of Pat Cuneo, we have been able to stretch simple 1950s history themes to regional history and beyond, connecting happenings from my old neighborhood to the larger world. Lately, we have wondered if there could be a local history book hiding in the more than 200 volumes that have been released.

But back to the “stars of the show,” the Presque Isle osprey. The best place to view two of the families that currently reside on Presque Isle is at Horseshoe Pond (where the boathouses live). Turn onto Coast Guard Road and head toward the channel. When you get to Horseshoe Pond, pull off the road on the right (west side) at the second clearing and you will see one large nest in a tree on the left (the east side of the road). If you wait patiently, you will almost certainly see the male bringing food (fish) and the female in the nest. If you are lucky, you may see babies. There is a second osprey nest on the opposite side of Horseshoe Pond about 300 yards away. Note that volunteers built an osprey stand that is clearly visible but abandoned. A season ago, while the ospreys were away, a Canadian goose coupe took it over. So, the returning osprey built a new nest in a tree just a few feet to the left. If you are wondering how baby geese fledged from the height of this stand, you are not alone.

Jerry Skrypzak provided the three wonderful pictures below.



Male osprey flying to the nest



Male osprey landing with the female waiting



Female guarding the nest

Don't forget to take binoculars!

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ACCIDENTAL PARADISE *13,000-Year History of Presque Isle*



By David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak

with

*Dr. Jerry Covert, Cheryl Heeneman, Brian Gula, Harry Leslie, Dr. John Lyons,
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Presque Isle County Historical Society • Presque Isle, Michigan

The beautiful book on Presque Isle published by authors David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak – “**Accidental Paradise: 13,000-Year History of Presque Isle**” – is on sale at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center’s gift shop and through a special website, AccidentalParadise.com.

The book, priced at **\$35 plus tax and shipping**, can be ordered now through the website sponsored by the TREC Foundation, AccidentalParadise.com.

Presque Isle Gallery and Gifts on the main floor of TREC, located at **301 Peninsula Drive, Suite #2, Erie, PA 16505** will also handle sales *daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

For more information, send an email to aperino@TRECF.org.

To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.



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