

Courtesy of Michigan Living * May 1986

Hack-Ma-Tack Inn

On Cheboygan River near M-27-M-33 junction, 8131 Beebe Rd., Cheboygan
(directions below)

“Undiscovered gem” is not a label we casually pin on a restaurant. Hack-ma-tack deserves it.

A lucky stopover last summer on a day’s float through Michigan’s Inland Waterway on a rented pontoon boat earned this place the designation, for ambience, service, attitude and very reasonably priced food. While “gourmet” has been bestowed on more and more northern Michigan eateries recently, we’d not even heard the name Hack-ma-tack since we covered it in this column 20 years ago.

Chilled by our windy but delightful all day cruise on Crooked Lake, across Burt Lake, through Indian River, across Mullet Lake, we tied up at this Inn’s 500-foot-long dock on the Cheboygan River about 5 p.m. The rustic 200-foot long, two-story log building set in a grove of towering tamaracks was inviting, as it must be to those who cruise here from Michigan yacht clubs in summer, or from nearby Burt Lake summer homes. (It’s just as inviting, we’re sure, to those who arrive by land, as many do.)

We entered the glass-walled Pow Wow bar area with log ceilings, walls and summoned a very dry Tanqueray martini. Could it have anchovy olives, we asked skilled bartender Mickey? It could, did, was excellent, bone dry at \$2.75. We noted that several elegantly garbed sailors from a yacht sat beside several who’d arrived by car, were tieless in summer slacks at the bar.

We sat at one of several tables around a large stone fireplace which dominates one wall, with a Jim Foote duck painting over it and a collection of old glass bottles behind the bar. We immediately liked the place so much that we reserved

several of its six very comfortable knotty pine rooms for rent upstairs for the night.

Bernard Gauthier has been the amiable chef here for 18 years, we learned. The 18 entrees he prepares very well could be classified almost gourmet because quality ingredients are used, with appropriate preparation. It's American cooking, and if you seek "blackened" Cajun anything or a fancy French sauce, don't come here.

Suitably warmed, we adjourned to the adjacent high-ceilinged dining room seating 110. Through its large picture windows front and side, we felt almost like we were sitting outdoors, surrounded by greenery. And a well-clipped lawn 200 feet across the Cheboygan River was visible through cedar, birch trees.

Retired Detroit Newsweek bureau chief Jim Jones and lawyer John Norris pronounced their broiled whitefish almondine \$9.95 excellent, fresh, sweet, with "outstanding" New England seafood chowder \$1.50 a cup, with a rich, smoky bacon flavor.

Former Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Harry Whiteley's baked scallops \$10.95 found favor, along with herring in cream sauce \$2.95 "great." Retired "Mr. Michigan Outdoors" Mort Neff and Michigan Living publisher Ron Steffens had broiled pork chops \$7.95, jumbo (five large ones) shrimp cocktail \$4.95 they found fine.

My French onion soup with melted cheese \$1.50 passed muster, and my large cut prime rib \$12.95 (regular cut \$10.95) was huge, well marbled, very rare as ordered, very flavorsome. With dinners come tossed salad, baked potato, fresh baked bread.

Other entrees run buffalo burger \$5.95, baby beef liver \$7.95 to lake trout \$9.95, New York strip steak for two \$23.50. Next time we'll try chef's frog legs \$8.95 or buffalo steak \$11.95. (1986 prices could be a tad higher).

We resisted home baked pie, ice cream pie \$1.95 but an after-dinner grasshopper \$2.95 went down easily as we sat at the bar looking out on the yachts, wondering if the rich folks are any happier.

Personable owners Susan and Mike Redding explained that Hack-ma-tack was built in 1894 by the late Watson Beebe as a private hunting and fishing lodge which Roy Perry, a retired AAA Michigan claims executive, ran until they bought it in 1981. Lunch noon-3 p.m. July-August. Dinner 5-10 p.m. May 1- Oct. 30. Reservations for parties of 10 or more. Phone (231)625-2919 –LRB

(Another way to get here: Leave I-75 at Topinabee-Cheboygan River exit, drive 17 miles on -M-27.)