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Petoskey stones are masses of fossil colony coral *Hexagonaria percarinata*. They occur abundantly in Devonian reef limestone of the Traverse Group in northern lower Michigan. The Devonian Period was about 350 millions years ago. Coral groups had weathered out of the limestone and were widely scattered by Pleistocene glacial action. They are readily found on beaches and in gravel deposits as pebbles and cobbles rounded by erosion. Petoskey is the English adaptation of Ottawa Indian "be-dos-e-gay" or "petosegay," meaning "sun rays of the dawn."

■ Pamphlet (undated) of the Geological Survey Division, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

About the Petoskey Stone

Who said rocks do not talk? For example, a Petoskey stone, through legend and fact, can tell you much about Michigan history and geology.

Legend and history are often intertwined. Such is the case with the Petoskey stone. The name Petoskey stone likely came about because it was found and sold as a souvenir of the Petoskey area. The name Petoskey appears to have originated late in the 18th century. Its roots stem from an Ottawa Indian legend.

According to legend, a descendant of French nobility named Antione Carre visited what is now the Petoskey area and became a fur trader with the John Jacob Astor Fur Company. In time he met and married an Ottawa Indian princess. Carre became known to the Indians as Nea-a-tooshing. Eventually he was adopted by the tribe and was made chief.

PE-TOS-E-GEY, THE INDIAN

In the spring of 1787, after having spent the winter near what is now Chicago, Chief Nea-a-tooshing and his royal family started home. Enroute, the party camped on the bank of the Kalamazoo River. During the night, a son was born to the Chief. As the sun rose, its rays fell on the face of the new baby. Noting the glorious sunshine on his son's face, the Chief proclaimed, "His name shall be Pe-tos-e-gay (or Be-dos-e-gay, there are several versions). He shall become an important person." The translation of the name is "rising sun," "rays of dawn," or "sunbeams of promise."

True to his father's prediction, Pe-tos-e-gay became an important person. He was a fur trader and merchant who acquired much land and wealth. His appearance was outstanding. His skin was smooth, his eyes sharp and deeply set, and he spoke English quite well. Ultimately he married the young daughter of Chief Pok-a-zee-gun, an Ottawa Chief from the northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan. They had two daughters and eight sons.



PETOSKEY, THE CITY

In the summer of 1873, just a few years before the death of Pe-tos-e-gay, a city came into being on his land along the bay at Bear Creek. The site was a field overgrown with June grass. Only a few nondescript buildings existed. The population was not more than 50 or 60. It was named Petoskey, an English adaptation of Pe-tos-e-gay. Thus they honored someone who gave his land, name and the heritage of "sunbeams of promise."

Today, Petoskey is a growing city with all of the comforts of modern life and an appreciation of the past. This is where Petoskey stones are found. For those who look, Petoskey stones are along the beaches, inland in gravel deposits and in gift shops.

PETOSKEY, THE STONE

The most often asked question is, "What is a Petoskey stone?" Petoskeys are a fossil colonial coral. These corals lived in warm shallow seas that covered Michigan during Devonian time, some 350 million years ago.

Almost a century after the founding of Petoskey, on June 28, 1965, Governor George Romney signed a bill that made the Petoskey stone Michigan's official state stone. It was fitting that Miss Ella Jane Petoskey, the only living grandchild of Chief Pe-tos-e-gay was present at the formal signing.

The legislation is very general. The bill simply states that the Petoskey stone is the state stone. The designation of *Hexagonaria percarinata* was made by Dr. Edwin C. Stumm in 1969. Dr. Stumm made this distinction based on his extensive knowledge of fossils.

This specific fossil coral is found only in the rock strata known as the Gravel Point Formation. The Gravel Point Formation is part of the Traverse Group of Devonian age and is a mixture of limestones and shales. The outcrops of these rocks are restricted to the Little Traverse Bay area near Petoskey.

The Gravel Point Formation is only part of the Devonian geologic history found in Michigan. Devonian age rocks form the bedrock for much of the northern Lower Peninsula. Devonian rocks outcrop at less than three percent of the surface of the United States. Michigan's average is much higher. Much of what is known about the Devonian is interpreted from the fossil record.

At least seven different species of the genus *Hexagonaria* are found in Devonian rocks in Michigan. *Hexagonaria* corals are found in Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, New York, Canada, Germany, England and even in Asia.