

The County Historian

News from the Ontonagon County Historical Society

Dean Juntunen, Editor

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NOTE: If you want an article published in the newsletter, send it to Dean Juntunen, 11425 Aspen Lane, Mass City, MI 49948, or e-mail it to deanjunt@jamadots.com.



MUSEUM NEWS

Greetings everyone. We have wrapped up another busy summer tourism season, and we thank everyone for their efforts.

At our annual meeting in August, three incumbent Board Members were elected: Dean Juntunen, Bruce Johanson, and Jerry Koski. Also, new Board Member Don Chastan was elected. Don had been serving as the Ontonagon Village Liaison, so he had been regularly attending our OCHS board meetings.

Officers elected at our September Board Meeting follow: President Bruce Johanson (for one more year, then he retires); Vice President Diane Penegor; Secretary Dean Juntunen; and Treasurer Dave Bishop.

As the fall colors wane, our museum hours will be reduced, though we plan to be open as in the past for the Christmas shopping season after

Thanksgiving. Don't forget that we have various clothing and sundries available in our Gift Shop, including local logos on some of the clothing.

Also, OCHS has reprinted Ontonagon County maps, which show the tourism highlights all around. The Chamber of Commerce reports that these maps have been very popular in the past.

Last, our Museum Manager, Coriane Penegor, desires your input on a fun item for our Gift Shop. She plans to have a candlemaker create a custom candle with an aroma that speaks "Museum and Lighthouse." If anything comes to mind, please

notify Ms. Penegor at the museum, 906-884-6165, or email ochs@jamadots.com. Personally, I'm hoping that the winner will not be pumpkin spice -- it's too overdone these days. Choose wisely, because the aroma will be present when you enter the Museum/Gift Shop. Due to perfume sensitivities, we don't want something too strong.

SHIP SAILS AGAIN

We had three Summer History Interns in our Program made possible by a grant from the Keweenaw National Historical Park Advisory Commission.



**SHIP Interns on their freshly painted fish tug, Sheryl Dennis.
Spencer Schuster, Cooper Smydra, Easton Smydra.**

We hit a home run with the three upstanding young men who signed on with us this summer: Easton and Cooper Smydra, and Spencer Schuster. President Johanson remarked that it was like working with adults. He'd just point them toward a project, and they'd take care of it -- no micro-managing required. Among other projects, these interns painted the Sheryl Dennis fish tug, which will be on display at a fishing museum on Rose Island in coming years; and, they painted the Awanita, a fish-tug sized wooden boat on display at our Lighthouse grounds. The boats are looking spiffy. Also, we've received a donated wooden boat built by the late George Mikkola. It was given to us by the Larus, who now own the former George Mikkola property back of Mass City. This boat will be on display next summer, too.

ACQUISITIONS

Diane Penegor is now in charge of Acquisitions, as Jean Lind has retired. Jean had served us well for many years in Acquisitions.

Speaking of Acquisitions, we recently received a couple of interesting ones. First, David J. Ryzak donated an epidote specimen laced with copper. The

specimen is from the Michigan Mine near Rockland and has two pneumatic drill scars in the copper. See below.



Also, Jane Munson donated her father Jack Lockerby's old Conn 80A cornet, which includes "naked lady" engraving, which is rare on Conn-produced cornets. This instrument is gold-plated, too, so it weighs more than you'd expect.

Bruce Johanson, well-versed in the history of musical instruments, noted, "It's a Conn 80A long model cornet with opera glass tuning slide, quick change from B Flat to A, and original mouthpiece and case. The instrument is GOLD plated over silver and is in excellent playing condition. It has a .487" bore which is huge by any standards -- normal today for a cornet or trumpet is .460 inch. It's a real gem." See below.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Bruce Johanson

Greetings Fellow Historians and Friends:

We are nearing the end of another successful summer and fall season at the Ontonagon County Historical Society. Though our numbers were down slightly, our revenue has held steady and

we enter the coming winter hours in a healthy position. This is a far cry from the days when we would close for the winter because we couldn't afford to heat the old museum building at the corner of River and Copper. Actually we have come a long way since we made the move to the current location in 1993.

Among the milestones:

1. We enlarged our image in the community and became the centerpiece of River Street. Visitors now tell us that we have the most interesting small-town museum in the region.
2. Your Society, after much agitation on our part, was finally accepted into the heritage Sites network of the Keweenaw National Park which has been of inestimable value to us.
3. Your Board of directors took a gamble and hired a grant writer which started us out on our Summer History Intern Program, which has gone a long way to impressing on many young people the value of knowing something about history, but also has given the youngsters of the area some ownership in the

museum. We also host several school groups each year for museum tours. Our Local History SMACKDOWN teams have also brought first place honors more than any since the inception.

- 4. The Ontonagon County Historical Society acquired ownership of the Historic Ontonagon Lighthouse which involved us with the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association and brings to our doors lighthouse buffs from throughout the nation.
- 5. Our greatest accomplishment has been acquiring ownership of the Museum at 422 River Street. We have installed LED lighting, air conditioning, and modern heating.
- 6. We now host the Chamber of Commerce Information Center which brings even more people through our doors.
- 7. Working in partnership with the Friends of the Porkies, we have a website that provides great information about what and who we are. We also maintain a FaceBook page.
- 8. Future plans are to move the fish tug Sheryl Dennis to its permanent home on Rose Island and to also set up a fishing museum.

All in all, we have made great strides in the last 25 years, and this fall we also hosted the Northland Consortium of Historical Societies and Museums in Ontonagon. The Consortium is an organization which increases our partnership base and goes hand-in-hand with the out-of-state advertising that we do.

It must be kept in mind however, that, as with many smaller historical societies, many among our membership as well as our Board

REQUEST

You can save us money and resources if you opt to receive your newsletter electronically in pdf format. Your computer is probably already equipped with the Adobe Acrobat Reader, but if not, you can go to the Adobe website and download it. So far, over 100 people have signed up for e-newsletters. Graphics are better in pdf, and you can zoom to your preferred font size. If you're interested, please send an e-mail request to deanjunt@jamadots.com.

Members are aging and the time is rapidly approaching when younger and more energetic members will have to step forward and prepare themselves to assume the leadership roles.

Given the challenges we face as a historical society, to serve the community, honor the past achievements of the area, and encourage our young people to know something about their local area, this is not the time to rest from our efforts, but to move forward to assure that what we started 60 years ago will continue to honor the heritage of Ontonagon County.

LIGHTHOUSE NEWS



Our summer tour season was a blast, as always, and now it's over. However, we still offer Light-

house Tours by appointment. It is especially fun to give tours to descendants of Ontonagon Lighthouse Keepers.

We just picked up a new sponsorship at the Lighthouse. Don and Sue Helsel and their friends Dick and Jody LaBarre have sponsored the Oil House for \$3,000.

If you are interested in being a lighthouse philanthropist, too, we still have the following rooms or structures available for sponsorship.

30 Spiral Steps	\$300 ea
Master Bedroom	\$5,000
1st-flr 1890's kitchen	\$6,000
West Parlor	\$6,000



UPCOMING DINNER MEETINGS

ALL DINNERS AT 6:30 pm

October 19, Thursday -- Holy Family Catholic Church
(Doreen Parker Responsible)

Dan Truckey, from the NMU Beaumier Center (historical museum) will give a presentation on UP ghost towns -- one from each county. For Ontonagon County he will speak about Victoria.

November 16, Thursday -- Holy Family Catholic Church
(Bill Chabot responsible)

Bill Chabot will present a digital slide show called

“Historical Screwwups.” Humor is included.

December 21, Thursday -- Holy Family Catholic Church
(Jerry Koski responsible)

Program to be announced.

January 18, Thursday -- Location to be announced
(Don Chastan responsible)

The program will be either on the Apostle Islands Underwater Preserve or the Rock Island Lighthouse off the tip of the Door Peninsula.

PAST PROGRAMS

June:
(Martin Buscombe responsible)

Martin Buscombe and his wife Arlene gave a presentation on the evolution of food to the table, focusing on how groceries and their transit to the kitchen have evolved, along with the evolution of the kitchen itself. They also spoke on local foods over the years, and pasties were served as part of the meal.

July:
(Diane Penegor responsible)

Tim Nelson, Social Studies teacher in the Ontonagon Area School, gave a presentation on a field trip he had led to the Presidential Inauguration, Memorials, and Museums in Washington, DC in January of this year. The trip was well-organized, and an eye-opening experience for our local youth.

August:
(Bruce Johanson Responsible)

Bruce narrated a play he had written, called “Time and Testimony.” It was a radio-style play, with parts read by several society members. The play was based on a murder story from Matchwood in the south end of the county, and Bruce provided some props, including a starter’s pistol which fired blanks. It was a good show.

September:
(Dean Juntunen responsible)

Dan Fountain of Negaunee gave a presentation on the history of mineral mining in the UP, focusing on silver mining, which of course was primarily in the Silver City area in Ontonagon County. Silver mining in our area involved several people of historical fame, such as Captain Hooper, Daniel Beaser, and William Spalding.

Editor’s Note:

The following is a research paper written by Cooper Smydra, who was an excellent Summer History Intern for us this past season.

EARLY LOGGING IN ONTONAGON COUNTY

By Cooper Smydra

The first sawmill in Ontonagon County was set up in 1852 by John G. Parker. It was a small mill located just above what is now known as Rose Island, the small sand bar-like island that is between the slough and the Ontonagon River. The plant was powered by a small 11

horsepower steam engine that was fueled by wood. This mill could only produce a very small amount of wood, about 5,000 board feet per day. After a few months of operation, the plant caught fire and burned down.

One of the first large demands for lumber in the ontonagon area was the building of the Minesota Plank Road in 1850. The plank road was created on government property by two mines, the Minesota Mine and the National Mine. This was the first plank road in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. These mines created the road running along the river to bring copper to the stamping mills in the winter while the river was frozen. To build this road, they dug holes in the ground and placed logs lengthwise and then laid any type of planks they could find on their property. This road was a toll road, so at all times they had to have a toll gate keeper. His name was Michael Spellman and he was actually one of the early lighthouse keepers as well. Since the toll keeper had to be there at all times, the mines built a house for Mr. Spellman. That house is the oldest frame house in Ontonagon Township.

There was a large demand for white pine because of the Chicago fire, other building purposes, and for the production of matches. The Chicago fire was a massive tragedy that took place on



The Historic Spellman House

October 8 of 1871 and burned for two days. The fire killed 900 people and made over 3,000 homeless. The fire burned down almost all of Chicago, so most areas in the Northern or Eastern United States that had white pine were logged. The reason why they used white pine was because it is good for building frames of houses and other buildings. It is a good hard wood with straight lines and it holds nails very well. Since white pine was plentiful, the logging companies would log it and sell it in stores for building purposes.

A company named Diamond Match came to Ontonagon in 1884 for lumber to make matches because white pine is a great wood for matches. In making matches, they use dry straight-grained wood like pine or aspen.

There were many different sawmills throughout the history of Ontonagon. The three principal mills were the Ontonagon Lumber Company, Sisson Lilly, and Diamond Match. The Ontonagon Lumber Company was a small mill that was founded by two brothers, Horace and Ancil Rich. Their mill was established in 1881. It could produce about 200,000 board feet of lumber per day and about 300,000 shingles per day. This small mill was run by an 11 horsepower steam engine.

Sisson Lilly had a mill a little larger than the Ontonagon Lumber Company's mill. Sisson Lilly was formed in 1882 and employed up to 250 people at one time. This mill could saw up to 225,000 board feet per day. The shingle mill could produce up to half a million shingles per day. Most mills at that time also had

their own shingle mills. The shingles were also used to rebuild Chicago and to make money for the mill's owners.

The Diamond Match Company was set up in Ontonagon in 1884. Diamond Match had the largest mill that ever came to Ontonagon. The mill could produce up to one hundred million board feet of lumber per year. In 1884, Diamond match was so big that it either bought out or pushed aside every other mill in the county. This is why Diamond Match was known as the "armpit of the lumber industry."

Diamond Match constructed a large mill and box factory on Rose Island. The lumber that Diamond Match cut down would be floated down the slough, sorted, and cut at the mill. Diamond Match had such a large company that they did most of the logging in the area throughout the years between 1884 and 1896. Diamond Match harvested white pine and made piles of lumber sitting next to the mills. Diamond Match, at one point, had 40 million board feet of lumber sitting in piles by the slough. They used it to make matches instead of using it for rebuilding Chicago, like many other lumber companies at that time did.



Diamond Match Lumber Pile

The Diamond Match Company also had a department store that was described as the merchandising wonder of the Upper Peninsula. The Diamond Match store was a four story building with a full basement. It was located on 600 River Street and it was the largest store ever in Ontonagon. The store opened the same general time the mill was opened in 1884. It was so large it occupied half of a block and even featured a freight elevator.



Diamond Match Store

Logging Camps were where the loggers would sleep, eat, store belongings, fix tools, and house farm animals like horses and oxen. Logging camps also contained many different buildings, most with different purposes. Each logging camp would contain a blacksmith shop, a woodworking shop, a barn, a cafeteria, and housing. Lumberjacks would have to cut down trees from 4 am to 10 pm. A common meal for lumberjacks when they came in for lunch and dinner would be pork, potatoes, beans, bread, and tea.

To harvest the trees, they would use axes and crosscut saws. Loggers would either cut down trees by themselves or the loggers would be in teams of two, using a crosscut saw. When done by a team, one person would have a handle on one side of the saw and the second person would be on the other side. The goal was to be

efficient and not to waste too much energy so the concept of it is so that the only thing that the loggers would have to do is pull.

In the earlier days of logging, the crosscut saw did not have anything to remove the sawdust so the saw would get jammed and was hard to use. In the later days of logging, Robert E. Poindexter added a raker in between each two teeth to clear the sawdust. This made logging by manual labor much more efficient.

To transport the logs, the loggers had to create ice trails for sleighs. Ice trails were man-made, smooth paths in the snow. Large 100-gallon tanks of water would be carted around by horse and sprayed on shoveled pathways. These pathways led to the river so that when the ice on the river melted, the logs could be floated downstream. By the end of winter, heading into the spring, the river banks were almost covered completely by logs.

The logs would be stacked to take up less space. Some stacks could get to be 20 feet tall. Ice trails made it possible for sleds that the horses were pulling to move, and it would also take a lot less time to move the logs.

When the logs were floated down the river, they were directed down the slough or the main river to be processed in one of the saw mills. Once they reached the sawmill, they would be sorted into different sections called boom areas. This would separate the different companies from each other.

Once they were separated by company, the logs would have to be cut. Each company either used a bandsaw or a buzzsaw. A buzzsaw is a circular-shaped

blade that is spinning to cut logs. A bandsaw is a long loop of steel saw blade that is moving fast to cut the wood. Once the logs were cut, they had to be dried in large kilns. Hundreds of board feet would go into a kiln at a time. The logs were in the kilns for about 30 minutes to dry them to the proper moisture content.

Logs would then be shipped off in large freighter boats that would come into Ontonagon through the Ontonagon River. Once the ships came into the mouth of the river, a lumber hooker had to pick the logs up. A log hooker is like a large crane on top of boats to transfer large loads. Once all of the wood was on the ships, the ships would leave and travel for long periods of time to ship them through the Great Lakes to harbor cities. All of the logs had to be shipped out of Ontonagon so that the lumber companies could make a profit. All of this boating traffic resulted in Ontonagon becoming the most used port on Lake Superior at the time.

The logging era in Ontonagon had two main effects on the economy of Ontonagon. The economy of Ontonagon had changed when all of the mines closed down following the civil war when copper was needed less. First, with the logging industry, the economy rebounded. In town, there were many hotels. One of them was very prestigious and was used primarily for investors coming to look at what kind of money they can make in this part of the Upper Peninsula.

Secondly, the logging industry brought about 1000 people back to Ontonagon to work. There was almost no unemployment throughout the entire town.

The Ontonagon Fire is probably the most tragic thing that happened to Ontonagon. Diamond Match Company was getting rid of the wood scraps by burning them carelessly on Rose Island. On August 25, 1896, there were very bad storms coming over the horizon. The storms were so bad that they produced gale force winds. The coals and embers from burning the scraps got ignited again from the winds. Wind speed at its highest point reached an estimated 75 miles per hour. That wind blew the embers around and the fires were raging. The workers could not contain the fire and it grew out of hand. The fire eventually grew so big that it caught the 40 million board feet of dried lumber on fire. That made the fire become so large that it was throwing 5-foot pieces of wood into the air just by the updraft that it was creating. Once the wood caught on fire, there was no way to stop it so the fire eventually caught a building on fire and since the design of Ontonagon has all of the buildings so close together, they all took fire rapidly. The fire went all the way up the Rockland Road and almost burned down the toll house, but it survived. In total, the fire killed one person and caused 2.5 million dollars worth of losses and 75 million dollars worth of insurance claims. In today's economy, the fire equates to about 73.1 million dollars worth of losses. In the end, Diamond Match decided not to rebuild their mills and left Ontonagon, and this marked the end of the great white pine logging era.