

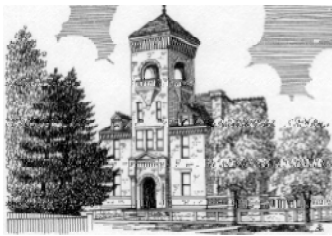
The County Historian

News from the Ontonagon County Historical Society

Dean Juntunen, Editor

Autumn 2016

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 had a grand summer, as always. However, as our fall season winds down, we will be scaling back our hours. As of October 23rd, the Museum will be closed on Sunday, Mondays, and Tuesdays; open Wednesday through Saturday from 11:00 a.m. through 4:30 p.m.

Also, we will have deals and specials for Black Friday and Small Business Saturday, which immediately follow Thanksgiving. We are closed for the holiday of course, but come check out the deals and specials thereafter.

Our Hometown Christmas Open House is set for Saturday, December 3rd. We will have our usual food table, musicians, and leaden fortune-telling in the tradition of the Kalevala.

Starting on Friday, December 2nd, just prior to our Open House, we will again hold our Old-Fashioned Fridays until

Christmas. For Old-Fashioned Fridays, we remain open until 7:00 p.m.

In other news, Carol Maass reports that our mini-grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) is coming to a close, and our new, dynamic website will be going live soon. The web address will remain the same,

www.ontonagonmuseum.org.

SHIP HAS SAILED AGAIN

Thanks to our annual grant from the Keweenaw National Park Advisory Committee, we

hosted our Summer History Internship Program again (SHIP). Our bright youths this year are seen in the photo below, taken during a field trip to local historical sites. The SHIP interns also study local history, work on various restoration projects for OCHS, learn a bit about running our museum and lighthouse tours, and more. They are paid for their summer services. The program culminates with a research paper by each intern on local historical topics, and the papers will be printed in future issues of The County Historian. We formally thank our interns for their services.



L to R: Hannah Davidson, Jourdyn Wallace, Manager Coriane Penegor, Logan Latvis, and Ailee Graff.
Location: Lookout Mountain above Victoria Dam near Rockland.

AMAZON SMILE

Amazon offers an interesting option for people who buy things on Amazon online. OCHS is not interested in undercutting local businesses with Amazon purchases, but many of the things that we buy from Amazon are not available locally. So, if you are an Amazon shopper from time to time, you can opt for one half of one percent of your purchase price to be donated to your favorite 501(c)(3) charity, one of which is OCHS. Simply go to <https://smile.amazon.com/> to make your purchase. The first time, you will be asked to choose your favorite charity, and you'll easily find Ontonagon County Historical Society in the list. Thereafter, OCHS will automatically be your chosen recipient unless you chose to change it. OCHS can request a check from Amazon whenever our total in the Amazon "bank" exceeds fifty dollars.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER **by Bruce Johanson**

Dear Members and Friends:

Well, we have completed another summer and what a summer it was! We may have broken the record for head count at the museum, and on the Labor Day weekend we celebrated the 150th year that our lighthouse has stood... in fact, we have the oldest standing lighthouse on the mainland of the Keweenaw Peninsula and we are very proud of that fact!

Three of our interns have finished their tour of duty and were given their stipend for their work over the summer. The 4th intern is doing her senior class project at the

museum as she continues to put together her special project, a History of the Firesteel area.

Our partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, which was housed in our Museum this summer, has worked to the advantage of both organizations. The Chamber's volunteers worked in harmony with our own gift shop business as well as our lighthouse tour count with more people coming through our doors.

Perhaps you noticed a red telephone booth outside our front door. Last year, when the last working telephone booth was removed from the corner of River and Houghton street, we asked the Ontonagon County Telephone Company if we could have the landmark booth, the last one in the County, for our museum collection. Because of damage from salt and other factors, the aluminum booth was in poor condition so we were instead given an all-steel booth that was formerly at the marina, AND a telephone to go inside! Believe it or not, some tourists want to have their picture taken either inside of or beside a telephone booth. Of course, we also have inside the museum the first telephone booth, of oak wood, installed in Ontonagon County by our historic telephone company, so now we have the first and the last.

Our neighbors at Designlines Salon have completed the interior of their expanded shop and it is quite nice. We still had some roof leaks from the earlier roof replacement, so Board member Martin Buscombe and your President went on the roof and sealed the flashing, then sealed the entire front of the building to stop water from seeping through the

concrete blocks. So far, no more leaks.

We have also sealed up the back door of the museum as we were being invaded by mice. The cupola on the roof is now closed up for winter and we are almost ready for the long cold season.

We have assigned the monthly Society meetings and schedules for the year ahead, and there will be great programs and delicious meals as we move into the coming months.

Finally, our new web page is about to go "live" and it is quite an eye-ful. If you don't have a computer or email, please do yourself a favor and visit a friend who can show it to you. Same old address, www.ontonagonmuseum.org. You will be amazed!

Bruce H. Johanson,
President OCHS

LIGHTHOUSE NEWS



During the day of our Sesquicentennial Celebration of the Lighthouse, we gave 256 Lighthouse Tours!

Also, the Lighthouse fund has purchased a "light box," which demonstrates how Fresnel lenses work, turning all light that passes through from inside the lens into an outgoing horizontal beam, with almost no dispersal.

Last year, a generous donor sponsored our Brick Outhouse at

the Lighthouse for \$3,000. See photo below.



After pondering his plaque for many months, our outhouse sponsor finally settled on the following inscription:

**Philosophy Outpost --
Sponsored by Dean Juntunen**

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

32 Spiral Steps	\$300 ea
Oil House	\$3,000
Master Bedroom	\$5,000
1st-flr 1890's kitchen	\$6,000
West Parlor	\$6,000

**ONTONAGON
WALKING TOUR**

Eagle Scout Ben Strong of Ontonagon has created a first-class walking tour of Ontonagon as his Eagle Scout Project, including excellent signage. When finished, Ben still had some money in his signage fund, which he turned over to OCHS. From this point forward, OCHS will maintain the signage and such. We expect the walking tour to be popular amongst tourists.

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.

**BOARD MEMBER
UPDATE**

We held our annual election in August. Ruth Zimmer, now a nonagenarian, chose not to run again. In honor of her long service, Ruth Zimmer was appointed Board Member Emeritus.

The other three incumbent board members, Dave Bishop, Bill Chabot, and Diane Penegor chose to run again.

Also, board member William Fischer had moved to Minnesota, so he resigned his OCHS board seat, leaving a fifth opening for the election.

At our annual meeting, the following five people were elected to the board:

- Dave Bishop
- Bill Chabot
- Diane Penegor
- Martin Buscombe
- Margot Anderson

Margot Anderson and Martin Buscombe are new to the board and we thank them for their offer to serve. Martin is one of our

excellent Lighthouse Tour Guides, too.

As always, we elected board officers in September, and the slate remains the same as last year:

- President -- Bruce Johanson
- Vice President -- Josie Olson
- Secretary -- Dean Juntunen
- Treasurer -- Doreen Parker

RIEGER ENDOWMENT

Sociologist Jon Rieger, from the University in Louisville, KY, now retired, had been working on a sociological-historical program in which he photographs locations in Ontonagon County every five years, primarily businesses. After several decades, the 5th year photos, always taken from the same spot at roughly the same time of day and season, show the patterns of history in Ontonagon County. Now in his retirement, Jon Rieger's preference is that the program would live on in perpetuity; thus, he created a Foundation such that the interest generated will be able to fund the hiring of a professional photographer every five years for the project.

OCHS agreed to a contract to perpetuate the project. The next five-year photos will be taken in the year 2020.

Jon Rieger has been a longtime friend of OCHS, and we give him our utmost thanks.

**TROUT CREEK
LIBRARY DONATION**

The Trout Creek Library Committee had been a nonprofit corporation; however, they recently disbanded. Since they had some funds on hand, they had to disburse them to other

nonprofits. We thank the Trout Creek Library Committee for their generous donation of \$1,250.



UPCOMING DINNER MEETINGS

ALL DINNERS AT 6:30 pm

October 20, Thursday -- Paul's Superior View Restaurant
(Dean Juntunen Responsible)

Michelle Blood from the Iron County Historical Society will give a presentation titled, "Building Iron River," focusing on the history of prominent buildings in Iron River.

November 17, Thursday -- Holy Family Catholic Church
(Jerry Koski responsible)

Graham Jaehnig, Daily Mining Gazette Writer, will give a presentation on Houghton history.

December 15, Thursday -- Holy Family Catholic Church
(Doug Anderson responsible)

Daniel Fountain will give a presentation on UP minerals, focusing on Ontonagon County and the western UP.

January 19, Thursday -- Holy Family Catholic Church
(Josie Olson responsible)

Presentation to be announced.

PAST PROGRAMS

June:
(Dave Bishop responsible)

Lynette Webber from the Keweenaw National Historical Park presented "Missing in the Copper Country," a digital slide show in which she superimposed historic images of buildings over the same site today. The effect is striking.

Also, Leann Jessup gave a presentation on the expansion project at Aspirus Ontonagon Hospital, which is currently under construction.

July:
(Diane Penegor responsible)

Scott See from the Keweenaw National Historical Park gave a presentation on the preservation and restoration of the Quincy Smelter in Ripley.

August:
(Bruce Johanson responsible)

Bruce Johanson gave a presentation on our Summer History Internship Program through the years, bringing it right to the present.

September:
(Bill Chabot responsible)

Larry Chabot gave a presentation titled, "Guess Who Was Here," speaking on famous or infamous people who have visited Ontonagon County and the UP.

Editor's Note:

The following is a short paper by one of our SHIP interns from the summer of 2015. The 2016 papers will start to appear in the next issue.

The Ontonagon Lighthouse

By Dustin Brand



The Village of Ontonagon is located in the Western Upper Peninsula of Michigan at the mouth of the Ontonagon River, which is the largest river on the south shore of Lake Superior. The village of Ontonagon was established in 1843 as a port, and is the oldest port on the south shore of Lake Superior. (Riter, 2004)

When Douglass Houghton reported the presence of copper near the mouth of the Ontonagon River, the copper boom started in the early 1840's. At this time, Ontonagon became the busiest of little villages. (Shegan, 2004)

The best way to haul materials, copper, and men to and from the local mines at that time was by schooner, or another large vessel. A lighthouse was needed to guide the ships into the harbor safely at times when the weather was foggy, dark, or stormy. (Johanson, Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse, 2015)

The Ontonagon harbor was and still is the safest harbor within fifty-seven miles in either direction. When we say "safest," we mean depth and widthwise, in the event a large lake freighter had to come in for an emergency. The harbor to this day is still considered a commercial port.

(Johanson, Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse, 2015)

The U.S. Department of Commerce and the Lighthouse Service acquired the land for the lighthouse on the west bank of the Ontonagon River (Shegan, 2004)

The Lighthouse was to be built in 1851 at a cost of five thousand dollars. The money was appropriated on September 28, 1850. (Roach, 2007)

A contractor from Detroit, MI, named F. W. Chittenden, built the original lighthouse. Construction didn't begin until the year 1852 though. The original lighthouse was a wooden structure with the lantern tower rising from the center of the dwelling. The lighthouse was finally staffed in the year 1853. (Johanson, Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse, 2015)

The original Ontonagon Lighthouse was illuminated by Argand Winslow Lewis lamps consisting of six individual lamps backed onto a reflector. In 1858 the original light was replaced with a newer Fresnel lens, which was developed by a French physicist by the name of Augustin Fresnel. The original Fresnel lens that was used in the lighthouse is now on display at the Ontonagon County Historical Society Museum. (Roach, 2007)

The Fresnel lens that was used at the Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse was manufactured by Louis Sautter in 1857, and is a fifth order in size. First order is the largest.

When operating, the Ontonagon light was visible from 12 to 14 miles out. The Fresnel lens cost six hundred dollars in 1858, and it weighs 125 pounds. The light was able to be seen farther and brighter with the Fresnel lens than the Winslow Lewis lenses.

The original wooden lighthouse lasted only a few years. It was subject to flooding during spring breakup, which undermined the foundation. The lighthouse at that

time was located only twenty feet from the shore of Lake Superior.

There were only four lighthouse keepers to serve the original wooden lighthouse. Samuel Peck served from 1853 to 1857. Mr. Peck was not a popular appointee and he was considered too uncooperative by the local powers.

Michael Spellman was the second lighthouse keeper, and he served from 1857 to 1862. Mr. Spellman was also the tollgate keeper of the Minesota Plank Road, and also served as the county jail keeper. During that time the Minesota Road surface was made of wooden planks. When Mr. Spellman was the Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse Keeper, he would have used the original Winslow Lewis lamps and he would have seen the conversion to the new Fresnel lens in 1858.

Adolphus Schuler was the third lighthouse keeper and he served from 1862 to 1864. Legend has it that Mr. Schuler's wife fell from the top of the lighthouse, resulting in her death.

Thomas Stripe was the fourth lighthouse keeper, and he served from 1864 to 1866 in the wooden lighthouse, and then moved to the new brick lighthouse built in 1866.

A new lighthouse, built of Milwaukee Cream City brick, was, as previously mentioned, constructed in the year 1866. The new lighthouse had a raised foundation, and the actual living space and kitchen were built high off the ground to protect the dwelling space from the spring floods.

The lighthouse tower is 39 feet tall. During this time the lighthouse was only 50 feet away from the lake shore. In 1856 the first permanent breakwaters were constructed at the river's mouth and the sand bar was dredged out to enhance the harbor. This interfered with the natural west to east current that moves along the south shore and deposition of sediments occurred on the upstream (west) side of the breakwater. Today

the lighthouse is about a quarter mile away from the lake. (Johanson, 2001)

In 1866 the new lighthouse was completed and Thomas Stripe was the first lighthouse keeper to serve in it. Mr. Stripe served in this lighthouse from 1866 to 1883. He was the Chief at the Ontonagon County Fire Company number 1, too. Mr. Stripe was born in Waterford, Ireland in the year 1825 and then was taken at the age of three to leave out "to the country of" Canada. (Johanson, Brief Notes on Thomas Stripe Keeper, 2005)

The second lighthouse keeper to serve in the brick building was James Corgan, serving from 1883 to 1919. Mr. Corgan was born on July 26, 1849 in Vaughn Township, Peel County, Ontario, Canada. (Mason, 2008)

Mr. Corgan married twice. Mr. Corgan's first wife was Mary Raheer, whom he married on November 30, 1872 in Houghton. Mr. Corgan was a teacher at L'Anse and that is where he met Mary. Mary was born in County Cork, Ireland.

The kitchen that one first enters when visiting the lighthouse was added in the year 1890 to give the Corgan family additional room. Prior to 1890 the kitchen was on the second floor.

Mary Corgan died on February 12, 1893 at the age of 36 in Chicago following a surgical operation. (Mason, 2008)

Mary Corgan had eight children, one of whom was born in an open boat on Lake Superior. Three years after Mary died, Mr. Corgan married Miss Josie Dolan. The kids got angry and they all moved out of the lighthouse to the village of Ontonagon. The older children ran their father's grocery store while the younger children were at school. Miss Josie Dolan was from Milwaukee, WI. Josie Corgan had four kids, but two of them died during birth. (Mason, 2008)

The third Lighthouse keeper in the brick building was Fred Warner, serving from 1919 to 1939. Mr. Warner was known as the local weather man, because when people asked him for the weather report for the village he would provide that information. His wife gave piano lessons to the local children at the lighthouse.

James Gagnon was the fourth lighthouse keeper to serve the new lighthouse, from 1939 to 1944. Gagnon was the keeper when the main light was electrified. He was also the first man to use a wireless radio at the Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse. After the year 1944 he was transferred to the Split Rock lighthouse north of Two Harbors, Minnesota.

The fifth lighthouse keeper was Alvah "Carp" Carpenter. He did not serve a full year, because he was near retirement age, so he served the year of 1944.

The last lighthouse keeper was Arnold Huuki, serving from 1944 to 1964. Arnold Huuki had a wife that taught at the Ontonagon Elementary School. Mr. Huuki was a native Yooper, originally from Jacobsville. He died on September 14, 1974.

The lighthouse keepers had more challenges in earlier years, because they didn't have any kind of radar system so they didn't know when a boat was coming in. The lighthouse keepers could never sleep for more than an hour at a time in the day and could not sleep at all in the night. They could only take short catnaps during the day.

The two dormers on the 3rd floor were added in 1904, to what were originally storage closets, in order to provide more bedroom space.

There are several items in the lighthouse that are actually from the light keepers or their families, such as Mrs. Corgan's wedding dress. The reason her dress is black is because she would only use it on special occasions, and if it was white it would turn yellow while stored in a trunk.

The oil lamp that is on display in the tower was actually used to illuminate the Fifth Order Fresnel lens. The lighthouse keeper had to carry sixty two pounds of oil (Johanson, Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse, 2015) to where it was needed in the brass oil transfer can that is also on display at the Ontonagon County Historical Society Museum. This transfer can is

part of the original equipment of the Ontonagon Lighthouse.

The light tower is three stories high, or 39 feet above the lake's water level to the focal plane, and is surmounted by an iron decagonal beacon house. (Roach, 2007)

The Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse had been included among the seventy two lighthouses in Michigan to be turned over to private organizations for restoration. (Johanson, The Battle for the Ontonagon Lighthouse, 2004)

When the lighthouse was decommissioned on January 1, 1964 (Jenvy, 2000), because of the battery-operated pier light and the automatic fog horn, (Roach, 2007), a request was made to the US Coast Guard to give the Ontonagon County Historical Society the Fifth Order Fresnel Lens to place in the Ontonagon County Historical Museum. In December 2000, President William Clinton signed the bill authorizing the transfer of the ownership of the lighthouse to the Ontonagon County Historical Society. In August 2003, the Ontonagon County Historical Society received the deed documents to the Lighthouse. (Pepper, 2012)



Conclusion

The restored Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse is now open to the public for tours, which illuminate the role that the Ontonagon Area has played in the development of the western Upper Peninsula and the Great Lakes. In addition to preserving our history, restoring the Ontonagon Harbor Lighthouse has provided another attraction for visitors of Ontonagon County.