



The County Historian

News from the Ontonagon County Historical Society

Dean Juntunen, Editor

Autumn 2023

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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.

Greetings everyone. We had a wonderful, busy summer as always. Our Lighthouse has been open 7 days per week for a couple of years, and this year we decided to have our Museum open 7 days per week as well (instead of 5 days per week). Our season started in late May, and our last day was October 14, 2023.

It takes a huge team of employees and volunteers to make a successful year, and for the extra two days of the museum being open each week we hired Pete Villalonga. Pete is a wonderful addition to the team.

We take this opportunity to formally thank the following army of magnanimous people:

Abramson, Naomi
Basile, Sue
Berman, Sally
Bishop, David
Brownell, Bob
Brownell, Mary
Burke, Laura
Butterbach, Eric
Chabot, Bill
Chastan, Don
Davidson, Kevin
Dembraski, Alex

Domitrovich, Tom
Doyle, John
Doyle, Larry
Dykstra, Shirley
Eckloff, Jean
Gauthier, Scott
Globensky, Kate
Guilbault Brothers
Holcomb, Jen
Hutto, Sandy
James, Victoria
Johanson, Bruce
Juntunen, Dean
Kallunki, Deb
KNHP Youth Work Crew
Koski, Jerry
Koski, Linda
Langlois, Ken
Lindberg, Howard
Maass, Carol
Maass, Steve

Malila, Fern
Menzemer, Jeana
Miller, Nathan
North Iron Church Group
Ojaniemi, Kristin
Ollila, Gail
Perry, Lyle
Pattison, Judy
Reid, David
Richardson, Sandy
Sells, Karen
Shardlow, Rob
Steiner, Brandi
Store, Steve
Vercillo, John
Vercillo, Sylvia
Villalonga, Pete
Webber, Lynette

That's over 50 people in all — an awesome team effort. BIG THANK YOU to everyone.



Howard Lindberg arranged for an Ontonagon artist to freshen our sign on the museum's River Street side. Treasure hunts have been popular.

PERSONNEL CHANGES

Carol and Steve Maass resigned from the OCHS Board in June due to family needs. Steve had been our Treasurer, and Carol had been our Curator and chief grant writer.

Carol leaves big curator shoes to fill, and we couldn't fill them with just one person, so Brandi Steiner is our new Collections Manager and curation is by committee. Fern Malila has assumed the role of our chief grantwriter.

Fern wrote a successful Covid relief grant to the Michigan Non-profit Association, who awarded us with \$10,000 to recoup our losses due to Covid in 2021.

Also, Fern recently completed a grant application to the Michigan History Alliance, which offers small grants to small organizations like ours. Fern says that our odds of success are good, and the grant will provide \$2,500 to apply toward our collections work.

Steve Store and Howard Lindberg stepped up to fill the board seats vacated by the Maass's, and Howard had planned to be our new Treasurer, but then Howard found it necessary to resign as well.

Fortunately, Eric Butterbach agreed to be a board member and Treasurer. Eric is the Vice President at Citizens State Bank and brings excellent skills to the Treasurer position. We are most happy to have Eric aboard, as Steve Maass left big Treasurer shoes to fill.

We now have four part time employees during the summer tourism season: Operations Manager Laura Burke, Collections Manager Brandi Steiner, and clerks Alex Dembraski and Pete Villalonga. During the winter, we have two part time employees: Laura Burke and Brandi Steiner.

Brandi and Laura will work on

our collections a lot during the winter, and when next May comes, they'll have us ready for another busy tourism season.

Board officers for 2023/2024 are President Dean Juntunen, Vice President Dave Bishop, Secretary Sally Berman, and Treasurer Eric Butterbach.

LIGHTHOUSE NEWS

Our lighthouse is in winter storage mode, but it saw an excellent summer, with visitors coming in record numbers.

OCHS has been collaborating with the Ontonagon Artists Collective (OAC), who is utilizing our former gift shop space in the museum. The OAC hosted a couple of Plein Air events on our lighthouse grounds in September, one of which occurred in conjunction with a visit from the Michigan Tourism Council. Both days saw

decent weather for open air painting. See below.

In August a photographer, Bruce Bowers from Flint, MI, had taken drone shots of our Lighthouse, and he gave us a copy of our favorite. See next page.

Also, August 6, 2023 was the 20th anniversary of our complete ownership of the Lighthouse. The legislation to transfer ownership from the Army Corp of Engineers to OCHS was passed at the end of the year 2000, but the Army Corp couldn't actually sign a deed to a non-governmental entity, so the Corps had to deed it to the Bureau of Land Management first, and the Bureau then deeded it to us. The wheels of bureaucracy turned slowly in this case.

Another interesting lighthouse-related tidbit is that James Corgan, one of our prominent Ontonagon lightkeepers (1883-1919), was post-



Left, an artist is at work creating a well-lit painting of our Lighthouse. Right, a completed painting of a lighthouse window. Many stories are contained inside of that window. Consider a tour next summer.



Photo credit to Bruce Bowers of Flint, MI, who took this drone shot of the Ontonagon Lighthouse in the summer of 2023.

MAY:	Museum avg 27 per day	Lighthouse avg 09
JUNE:	Museum avg 24 per day	Lighthouse avg 23
JULY:	Museum avg 31 per day	Lighthouse avg 37
AUG:	Museum avg 23 per day	Lighthouse avg 33
SEP:	Museum avg 21 per day	Lighthouse avg 24
OCT:	Museum avg 15 per day	Lighthouse avg 25

We beat last year’s visitorship by about 200, in both the museum and the lighthouse. Total visitors for this year’s tourism season were 6,978, counting dinner guests. As is typical, July was the busiest month.

Laura also shared data on our Treasure Hunts for the kids. We did 58 hunts in 2022, and with the increased emphasis in 2023, we tripled them and hit 179. We had a pirate on our side: Howard Lindberg, pictured below.



humously inducted into the Michigan Irish Hall of Fame in Muskegon in September of this year. The Hall wrote, “James is being recognized for his many years of leadership and accomplishments in the area of Public Service in the State of Michigan.”

In addition to being the Ontonagon Lightkeeper, James Corgan had also served as Mayor of Ontonagon, and had other community involvements. It’s unusual for a person to be honored a century after their accomplishments, but James Corgan indeed deserves that honor.

To learn more about Mr. Corgan, consider a lighthouse tour next summer.

If you are interested in being a lighthouse philanthropist, we still have the following sponsorships available:

- 25 Spiral Steps \$300 ea**
- Master Bedroom \$5,000**
- 1st-flr 1890’s kitchen \$6,000**

MUSEUM OPEN HOUSE

In collaboration with the Ontonagon Artists Collective, we were happy to host a museum Open House during Ontonagon’s Hometown Christmas weekend. The museum was open, with free admission and free treasure hunts for the kids on Saturday, December 2, 2023 from 4:00–8:00 p.m.

At the same time, the OAC was judging a gingerbread house competition in their space.

Also, for any kids who completed our Treasure Hunt, we had hot chocolate packets and candy canes available as additional prizes. Our regular prizes were an option, too.

OCHS VISITOR STATISTICS

Operations Manager Laura Burke keeps track of our visitorship, and she reported the following daily averages for the Museum and Lighthouse during the tourism season of 2023:

Howard had dressed up as a pirate for Maxwell Street Day, and he ruled the street in Ontonagon. He had kids following him like the Pied Piper. We had 38 Treasure Hunts in the museum that day, a new record.

2025 UP HISTORY CONFERENCE

We had been scheduled to host the June 2025 UP History Conference. We had last hosted this event in 2007, the year of our 50th Anniversary of existence. However, we recently received an email from Larry Wagenaar, director of the Historical Society of Michigan, who organizes annual history conferences:

Dear Ontonagon Historical Society,

After extensive discussion with our conference planning team, and in light of the difficulty we have encountered attempting to get a room block of sufficient size and at a reasonable cost in the area, we have decided to move the 2025 Upper Peninsula History Conference to Houghton/Hancock on the campus of Michigan Technological University. We would like a representative of the Ontonagon Historical Society to serve on the content planning committee, if possible, for that conference so we can include content from Ontonagon. Planning for 2025 will begin in the fall of 2024.

Thank you for your understanding as we navigate locations that can accommodate this conference and its increasing size.

~ Larry Wagenaar, Conference Chair

So on our end, Dave Bishop, John Doyle, Fern Malila, and Dean Juntunen have offered to help in Houghton.

PAST PROGRAMS

June — Dennis Chartier of Chassell took us on a photographic journey across the ocean, all the way to a very old civilization in modern-day Israel. He shared many photos, including the Wailing Wall, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Dennis Chartier had worked as an engineer at a Dead Sea site, and visited Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem. He noted that the Israelis and the Palestinians really live in quite close quarters in places. He saw numerous soldiers out and about, and during one visit he heard explosions. His local companion said, “Yeah, that happens.” [This was prior to the current war.]

Dennis also shared photos of a church with a very small entrance door. It dates to the Crusades, and the small doors prevented armored knights from fitting through the opening.

July — Bruce Johanson took us on a journey through time in the “modern” copper mining era of Ontonagon County, from the Lafayette in the mid-1840’s in the Porkies (was not a successful mine) followed by the Nonesuch (not successful) to the fabulously successful Minesota Mine in Rockland, which produced a record-breaking mass of copper about 46 feet long. Bruce also highlighted the Victoria, the Adventure, the Mass Consolidated, and finally the White Pine Mine which didn’t close until the 1990’s.

Bruce included the story of Noel Johnson, a freed slave credited with founding the Mass Mine. Bruce also touched on the Taylor Hydraulic Air

Compressor which used an arm of the Ontonagon River to produce energy for the Victoria Mine.

All mines prior to White Pine produced mass copper, but White Pine mined chalcocite, which is a copper-bearing ore, so it required smelting. Unfortunately, all mines have a limited lifespan, and we’re currently in a lull, though Copperwood plans to restart copper ore mining.

August — Master singing storyteller Bill Jamerson had come from Ironwood to share his program on the logging camp era in the UP, titled “Daylight in the Swamp.” Mr. Jamerson regaled us with several songs from the lumber camps, telling stories and historical facts between songs.

Mr. Jamerson related that the lumberjacks ate a lot of beans, and one of their nicknames for beans was “linen lifters.” A nickname for eggs was cackle berries. You weren’t allowed to joke while eating though, as that was serious business, and you never wanted to risk offending the camp cook. Many jacks chose their worksite based on which camp had the best cook. The jacks worked all day depending on the number of daylight hours available, from “Can See” to “Can’t See,” so they needed a lot of calories to fuel them.

Most of the logging was done in winter, and many of the lumberjacks were farmers in the summer. Lots of area Finns had emigrated to the US to work in a copper mine, then bought cutover timberland to start a farm as soon as possible, then farmed in summer and worked in lumber camps in the winter.

Mr. Jamerson recommends a couple of excellent videos online. The video from the L’Anse area

shows river drives among other things -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9hd5MuYH8Q>

The other recommended video includes clips of a cook shack in action -- <https://absolutemichigan.com/michigan/michigans-timber-harvest/>

September — Robert Hazen, who is a graduate student in the MS Industrial Heritage and Archaeology program at MTU, and is a member of the Lac Vieux Desert band and has been researching Native American history in the region, presented on Ojibwe history. He is currently working on a project with Dr. Carol MacLennan of MTU for the Keweenaw National Historical Park on an ethnohistory of Ojibwe.

Robert's program led us through the history of the Ojibwe tribe in our area in general, including the various treaties with the United States, and then he focused on the history of the Ontonagon Band in particular. When the US was setting up reservations, the reservation land given to the Ontonagon band was established out near 14-mile Point, and it was not attractive to anyone, including the natives. In the 1890 US Census Report, it was written, "*The land allotted to the Indians is perfectly useless and has never been occupied by them.*"

According to Henry Schoolcraft Rowe, who had visited Ontonagon in 1831, the Ontonagon band included 64 members in the village at the mouth of the Ontonagon River.

Robert Hazen reported, "The village site at the mouth of the Ontonagon was primarily for summer and winter months. However, Ontonagon Band members also lived around the Big Iron River at present-day Silver City. From Big

Iron River, a trail went on to Lake Gogebic near present-day Bergland, and from there to Lac Vieux Desert where there was permanent occupation and a site where tribes would meet to practice ceremonies and conduct trade. There was never a permanent village site near Lake Gogebic, but it is expected that this area was frequented in the summer and autumn. Trails from Lac Vieux Desert were primarily used for hunting and trapping, and were especially used for furs."

"Fishing (whitefish, trout, and sturgeon) was the main staple at Ontonagon, but hunting was practiced by the younger villagers in the winter. Government payments and annuities at La Pointe forced villagers to leave in the summer and winter months to collect their supplies."

Robert Hazen shared an interesting perspective regarding Land Acknowledgements, which are presently often heard prior to an event. He does not personally favor them. A typical acknowledgment reads, "*We must acknowledge and recognize that we are situated within the ancestral Anishinaabe homelands.*"

Robert noted, *However, as Graeme Wood (2021) says, "The practice of 'land acknowledgment'—preceding a fancy event by naming the Indigenous groups whose slaughter and dispossession cleared the land on which the audience's canapés are about to be served—is one of the greatest associate-producer credits of all time. A land acknowledgment is what you give when you have no intention of giving land. It is like a receipt provided by a highway robber, noting all the jewels and gold coins he has stolen. Maybe it will be useful for an insurance claim? Anyway, you are not getting your jewels back, but now you have documentation."*

October — John Doyle presented his program on the history of the Porcupine Mountains Ski Hill, which featured a DVD that he had created along with help from the late Jack Townsend. Bruce Johanson wrote the script for the DVD. John Doyle noted that Robert Sprague from the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park was instrumental in providing information and help for the creation of the DVD.

The DVD documentary started by talking about Elmer Webber, who was the founder of the ski hill. He had started working on the idea in the 1930's. By 1940, with the aid of a bulldozer from Northern Lumber Company, the first ski run was cleared, and a rope tow was installed. The Ski Hill was open for the winter of 1940/41, operated by the Porcupine Mountain Ski Club. The original name of the hill was Weather Horn Peak. By the end of the season in 1941, the club boasted 350 members. Annual dues were one dollar.

In the early years, the slopes were groomed by men on snowshoes, who "volunteered" from Camp Porcupine, a minimum-security correctional facility near Silver City. Later, when that facility was closed, Tucker Snowcats were employed for grooming.

In the mid-1940's, with the formation of Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, ownership and operation of the ski hill devolved to the State of Michigan, who changed the name, letting go of "Weather Horn Peak." The chalet and ski lifts went through a couple of iterations, culminating in today's two chair lifts (a double and a triple) and the current large chalet with the additions of the A-frame and deck.

The park privatized operations

in the mid-1990's when they signed a 20-year concessionaire agreement with Tony Meneguzzo. Operation of the ski hill was eventually signed over to Lonie Gliberman who also operates Mount Bohemia in the Keweenaw. Lonie was famous for NOT grooming the slopes at the Porkies. Then Gogebic Community College took over, and the ski hill became a family-friendly place again.

Recently, the state park once again took over operations.

November — Lynette Webber from the Keweenaw National Historical Park presented on the people of Ontonagon County from the 1880's, which was pre-fire in Ontonagon. Lynette does a lot of research through Digital Historical Resources - Keweenaw, which is a collection of free online links to historical information. This collection of links is maintained by the KNHP. If you're interested in doing your own historical research, just google "digital historical resources - Keweenaw." Also, check out the Ontonagon collections on UPLINK, uplink.nmu.edu.

Lynette shared stories and pictures of the Bigelow House, a four-story hotel which was once the biggest in the UP. It did not survive the Ontonagon Fire of 1896. Nor did the tower on top of the old courthouse.

Lynette also related stories of many of the prominent people from the 1880's, such as businessman James Mercer who became a State Representative and then a State Senator.

Another famous Ontonagon site in the 1880's was the Centennial Hotel, which had been founded by Lathrop and Sophia Johnson and was Ontonagon's first hotel.

When the Johnsons retired, the hotel was renamed from Johnson House to Centennial Hotel by their daughter Elizabeth and her husband, Frederick Adams, who took over ownership. It was located adjacent to the current Carquest-Bay Auto Parts store on the upper end of River Street.

Lynette had found several photos of various early Ontonagon settlers and their children. One of the most remarkable images is actually a painting by Grace Johnson Adams, daughter of Elizabeth and Frederick Adams. Grace is known today as "Little Grace," and was a talented artist who died young of complications from scarlet fever. Her "self-portrait," *Little Grace*, is on display in our museum.

Lynette also mentioned two iconic lightkeepers from Ontonagon. Thomas Stripe had served at the Ontonagon Lighthouse from 1866 when the current brick lighthouse went into service until 1883, after which James Corgan took over and eventually became our longest-serving Lightkeeper, retiring in 1919. Corgan had been a lightkeeper for a total of 54 years, starting at Gull Rock. He holds the record as the longest-serving lightkeeper in the history of the US Lighthouse Service. Thomas Stripe is famous for serving as a lightkeeper with only one arm.

In her research, Lynette learned that Thomas Hooper, the famous mining captain from Victoria, Nonesuch, and the Arvon Slate Quarry, also lived in Ontonagon for a short period in the 1880's. Many of Ontonagon's early citizens are buried in the Evergreen Cemetery. Lynette recommends the Evergreen as an interesting cemetery tour.

We always enjoy Lynette's well-researched presentations, and she

herself is an Ontonagon native, daughter of Gray and Patty Webber. She is doing a wonderful job of representing Ontonagon at the Keweenaw National Historical Park.

TRIBUTE TO DORIS MCDONALD

Doris McDonald is 100 years old, and still attends our monthly dinner meetings. To our knowledge, she is the oldest member of OCHS.

Doris lived in Ontonagon for as long as she can remember. Her family moved from the Wausau, WI area when Doris was 3 years old, as her father left a paper mill in Rothschild and was one of the first men to work in the mill in Ontonagon.

Little Doris Hanz grew up on the Rockland Road in Ontonagon, and when she graduated as valedictorian from high school, Robert O. Hills was the Superintendent, and Vic Keefer was the Principal. Keefer later became Superintendent from 1946 to 1969.

At age 30, Doris Hanz married Roger McDonald, an enterprising young man who came from Gladstone.

Doris and Roger McDonald built a new home on the Rockland Road not far from her childhood home, and she lives there to this day.

Doris worked at Rogers Insurance Agency for 45 years, and she and Roger had one daughter, Linda Ponder.

At age 100, Doris still drives. She credits her longevity to healthful eating habits and daily exercise. She also had strong community involvement and as a member of the Catholic Church spent 40 years in the choir.

Long live Doris McDonald!



422 River St
Ontonagon, MI 49953

**ONTONAGON COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MUSEUM & LIGHTHOUSE
TOURS AVAILABLE MID-MAY TO MID-OCTOBER**

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