



The County Historian

News from the Ontonagon County Historical Society

Dean Juntunen, Editor

Autumn 2024

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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. Both our museum and Lighthouse were open 7 days per week from May 13 to October 13, 2024.

It takes a huge team of employees and volunteers to make a successful year, and 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
Defoy, Dan
Domitrovich, Tom
Doyle, John
Doyle, Larry
Doyle, Pat
Duff, Shannon
Dykstra, Shirley
Eckloff, Jean
Fourez, Jon

Gardner, Ken
Graham, Linda
Guilbault Brothers
James, Victoria
Johanson, Bruce
JSP Construction
Juntunen, Dean
Juntunen, Duane
Kallunki, Deb
Koski, Jerry
Koski, Linda
Langlois, Ken
Malila, Fern
Menzemer, Jeana
Miller, Nathan
Ojaniemi, Kristin
Ollila, Gail
Perry, Lyle
Pattison, Judy
Reid, David
Richardson, Sandy
Sells, Karen
Steiner, Brandi
Workman, Marie
Workman, Ralph
Villalonga, Pete
Webber, Lynette

That's well over 40 people in all — an awesome team effort. **BIG THANK YOU** to everyone.

PERSONNEL CHANGES

The big news is that Laura Burke will be stepping down as our Operations Manager. Fortunately, Karen Sells has agreed to step up.

Karen has been volunteering at the lighthouse for a couple of years now, and she brings excellent office skills to the Operations Manager position. Laura will work with Karen throughout a long transition period over the winter, and once Karen is up and running in next

year's tourism season, Laura will retire from the museum to focus on her own business.



Our new operations manager, Karen Sells.

In other news, Pete Villalonga is no longer working at the museum welcome desk, and Ken Gardner has assumed that role. Ken is young and enthusiastic, and he did a nice job for us during a TV-6 Upper Michigan Today interview. We're hoping that he will stick with us for a long, long time.

Alas, our Board Treasurer, Eric Butterbach departed Ontonagon for a new job in Appleton, WI. Eric is sorely missed.

Also, board member Vikki James chose to retire at the end of her term in August. However, Vikki will continue to borrow old Ontonagon Heralds from the museum to write the "Time Machine" column in the newspaper.

New board member Jeana

Menzemer has stepped up to fill one of the vacant seats. We are still looking for a 12th board member.

Incumbents Jean Eckloff, Fern Malila, and Kristin Ojaniemi signed on for another 3 years.

Board officers for 2024/2025 are President Dean Juntunen, Vice President Fern Malila, Secretary Sally Berman, and Treasurer Dave Bishop.

MACC GRANT 2025

Fern Malila wrote a grant for us from the Michigan Arts and Culture Council (MACC). We had asked for about \$20,000 to build a ramp and platform system for the Sheryl-Dennis fish tug on the Lighthouse grounds, and also to replace our temporary wooden cradles with permanent concrete ones. Last, we plan to erect a wayside sign or two, talking about historic commercial fishing in Ontonagon.

MACC did award a grant to us, but due to the volume of requests, they reduced the amounts for everyone. Our award is \$6,863. We should be able to fund the concrete cradles and wayside signs, but not much else. We will have to contribute a small amount of matching funds, too. The project must be completed by the end of September 2025.

LIGHTHOUSE NEWS

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

We broke our single-day record with 89 visitors on August 8th. Rainy days are always the best.

On October 4th, we had a wedding at the lighthouse that ended by 5:30 p.m. Later that same even-



ing, a group of photographers from Chicago came to shoot the east face of the lighthouse at night, and then reset their cameras to photograph the stars, and they will merge the two scenes in photoshop to show the lighthouse with the milky way. They said that they'll send us a photo which we can use however we please.

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 Artist Collective, we will once again host a museum Open House on Saturday during Ontonagon's Hometown Christmas weekend. The museum will be open, with free admission and free treasure hunts for the kids on Saturday, December 7, 2024 from 4:00–8:00 p.m.

On that same day, the OAC will be judging a gingerbread house competition in their space.

OCHS VISITOR STATISTICS

Operations Manager Laura Burke keeps track of our visitorship, and she reported the following numbers during the tourism season of 2024:

MAY: Museum 141
Lighthouse 128

JUNE: Museum 614
Lighthouse 643

JULY: Museum 818
Lighthouse 1,106

AUG: Museum 637
Lighthouse 1,159

SEP: Museum 335
Lighthouse 731

OCT: Museum 201
Lighthouse 345

We beat last year's visitorship by more than 200. Total visitors this year were 7,267, counting dinner guests. As is typical, July and August were the busiest months.

DAVID SMYDRA FUND

David Smydra, formerly of Ontonagon, and his wife Marty have created a foundation to make donations to OCHS in perpetuity, should we continue to exist.

David writes, "In the instance of the Smydra Fund, Marty and I have made provisions to continue our ties to several communities and organizations that have played special roles in our lives. Ontonagon certainly qualifies in that regard."

David also writes, "There is nothing that OCHS needs to do for purposes of receiving periodic awards from the Smydra Fund — now or in the future. Whenever OCHS is included in the annual awards from the Fund, you will receive a check and letter on behalf of the Smydra Fund from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan."

David has long been a generous OCHS member, making regular donations. He has spurred me to create a similar foundation soon.

PAST PROGRAMS

June — Vikki James presented a comparison of Ontonagon to her old stomping grounds in Tunkhannock, PA (Wyoming County). She showed photos from both places. Both towns have Native American roots in their names, the houses look very similar, and the town populations are similar. Both are the county seat, and both host their county's historical society.

Ontonagon has the Ontonagon River, Tunkhannock has the Susquehanna. Tunkhannock was founded in 1841, Ontonagon in 1843. Both were mill towns at one point in their history, and both have had their town hospital closed. The nearest Emergency Room for both towns is now a bit of a drive.

The big difference is that Wyoming County has more population per square mile than Ontonagon County. Also, Tunkhannock is closer to big towns (Scranton or Wilkes-Barre), whereas Ontonagon is quite isolated.

For Vikki, life in rural Pennsylvania was very similar to life in Ontonagon. It was the paper mill in Ontonagon that brought Vikki here around the turn of the century, and she immediately felt at home.

July — Eric Butterbach presented the history of the Citizens State Bank of Ontonagon. Officially, the Citizens Bank of Ontonagon changed its name to The Citizens State Bank of Ontonagon on September 20, 1912; but, essentially, the Citizens State Bank started in 1910 at 301 River Street, where it ran until 1922. It then moved to 501 River Street (its current location) though the bank building has changed over the years.

In 1968, an expansion of the bank incorporated 509 and 511 River Street. 509 had been the Style Shop, and 511 had been the Clark Theater from 1920-1965. The stage part of the theater is still intact in the large back part of today's bank building.

Eric also told us about bank presidents over the years, including a long stint by Tom Strong, then Jerry Platzke, then Willie DuPont, and now with the new owners, Ann Lantz.

Eric said that at the outset the bank primarily financed area potato farmers, then transitioned to miners, loggers, commercial fishermen, and local businesses.

August — Dean Juntunen presented a photographic journey all the way around Lake Superior. He took the photos during his 21-year project of circumnavigating the big lake by kayak. His route was a total of 1,425 miles, and to his knowledge he is the first paraplegic to have paddled the whole thing. He invented a beach mobility device for the 4-day trip in Canada's Pukaskwa National Park. It's an aluminum frame with four Wheeliez fat wheels. His kayak had a sliding seat, which he'd slide out of the kayak and onto the aluminum frame. Then he propelled himself on the beaches with cross country ski poles.

Locally, the tip of the Keweenaw Peninsula, the Huron Islands, and Grand Island are in his top 10 paddling areas on Lake Superior. Canada has the Gargantua Peninsula, Pukaskwa National Park, Black Bay Peninsula, Sibley Peninsula (Sleeping Giant), and Pie Island. Minnesota has Palisade

Head, Shovel Point, and Manitow Falls. Wisconsin has the Apostle Islands.

If you're counting, that's more than 10, but it's really hard to cut it down to so few places. The most spectacular waterfall is Spray Falls in the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, which free-falls about 70 feet right into the big lake.

He said, "The Canadian coast is so wild and rugged that it makes the UP seem warm, soft, flat, and populated."



September — Dr. Daniel Trepal from the Michigan Tech Industrial Archaeology Department presented on his digital documentation efforts on the 3rd Level at the Adventure Mine in Greenland.

When Matt Portfleet had pumped the water out of the third level, Dr. Trepal and his research assistant, Grace Ojala, used hi-tech cameras and equipment to create an accurate digital map of the 3rd Level. Their main device was a FARO Focus Terrestrial LiDAR unit.

Their primary goal was to develop/demonstrate methodologies for deploying remote-sensing technologies to document and record fragile, high-integrity archaeological features within abandoned historical underground mine workings.

They mapped approximately 600 feet of drifts and stoped areas.

They photographed thousands of artifacts and features (such as footprints in the mud) in situ, and made great efforts to minimize disturbance of anything.

The Adventure Mine was rather ideal for this study because at the end, the miners just left, and everything was still intact. Many other mines were destroyed as they made their way out of the business.

October — Bill Fischer presented *Michigan's Cherry Industry*. Michigan grows more than 75% of the tart cherries produced in the US. We learned that cherries are botanically classified as drupes, along with other fruits with a central stone that contains the seed.

Bill Fischer is experimenting with cherry-growing on his farm on the LP Walsh road. The fruit belt of Michigan is along the Lake Michigan coast in the lower peninsula. Moderating weather off the lake makes for a favorable fruit-growing climate. Likewise, Bill feels that the moderating effect of Lake Superior makes weather that is feasible for tart cherries to flourish on his farm.

He started his experiment a couple of years ago, and it takes at least five years for the tart cherry trees to reach full production. Many of his trees are doing well, and he expects good results soon. He is also experimenting with some sweet cherry trees, but they are fussier in terms of climate. He says, "Stay tuned, and we'll see how they turn out."

Bill also says, "I'm growing trees for the pure enjoyment of doing so, nothing more."

He also says that if you drive past his farm in the spring, you'll

see an orchard full of gorgeous cherry blossoms.

Bill closed with a poem about cherries from an anonymous author. He also noted that if you seek information on cherry-growing, MSU Extension is a good resource, and they are available online. And if you seek enticing cherry recipes, he recommends marthastewart.com

Editor's Note: Please enjoy the following article by one of the UP's finest historians about an unusual topic.

Buffalo in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

By [Russell Magnaghi](#) | May 25, 2022

Studies dealing with the American buffalo—or more accurately bison—have traced their range far from their traditional homeland on the Great Plains. They ranged from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians and from Great Slave Lake in the Northwestern Territories of Canada to southern Texas.

In 1660, their eastern range was from Great Slave Lake through central Minnesota, down through southwestern Wisconsin, along the southern edge of the Great Lakes and eastward to the Appalachians. However these and other studies do not include their range into Lower Michigan or the Upper Peninsula. Today, data have been uncovered that add to the range of at least a small number of buffalo.

The first buffalo-related information comes from the pen of Pierre Esprit Radisson (c1640-1710). He was a French fur trader and explorer who worked with his partner and brother-in-law, Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers (1618-1696). In August 1659, the two men led a party and journeyed around Lake Superior gathering furs and investigating the future possibilities of trading in the region.¹

They spent the winter of 1659-1660 first just south of Lake Superior in Wisconsin and then at an Ojibwa village on the shore. By August 24, 1660 they had returned to Québec City with their furs and

accounts of their journey.

What interests us is that Radisson on his journey writes of the "buff" or buffalo in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, possibly along the south shoreline or near Sault Ste. Marie. The term buffe or wyld ox first appeared in English in Richard Huloet's *Abecedarium Anglico-Latinum* published in 1552.²

So Radisson is accurately writing about and describing what we know as the buffalo or American bison. He recounts: "As for the Buff, it is a furious animal. One must have a care of him, for every year he kills some Nadouseserons (Sioux/Dakota living in central Minnesota). He comes for the most part in the plains and meadows; he feeds like an ox." Then Radisson continues with a more detailed description of the animal:

The horns of Buffs are as those of an ox, but not so long, but bigger, and of a blackish color, he has a very long hairy tail; he is reddish, his hair frizzes and very fine. All the parts of his body much [like] onto an ox. The biggest are bigger than any ox whatsoever. Those are to be found about the lake of the Stinkings [Green Bay] and towards the North of the same. They come not to the upper lake [Lake Superior] but by chance. It is a pleasure to find the place of their abode, for they turn round about compassing two or three acres of land, beating the snow with their feet, and coming to the center they lie down and rise again to eat the bows of trees that they can reach. They go not out of their circle that they have made until hunger compels them.³

First we must discount Radisson's written English. He was a Frenchman with a rough knowledge of the English language. However his account is of the bison and from the way he writes he has seen the animals north of Green Bay. He further notes that they are not native to



the Lake Superior shoreline, but come "by chance." What has occurred is that some bison broke from the herd in west-central Minnesota or southwestern Wisconsin and traveled through the forests, finding pasture in open fields and grasslands.

The next account of buffalo nearing Lake Superior comes from Jonathan Carver (1710-1780) who was a colonial American military officer, explorer and writer. In 1766-1767 he explored Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota along the upper Mississippi River. He wrote that in the area between Lake Pepin and Eau Claire in western Wisconsin was covered with grasslands and afforded pasturage for buffalo that were there in plentiful numbers.

When seen at a distance they seemed to be like cattle grazing and he saw a drove of a hundred or more shading themselves from the noon sun under trees. Several were killed and they weighed 1,500 pounds but if properly fattened Carver felt that they could weight as much as 3,000 pounds. He concluded, "Their meat is very good and tender, and their fat is but a little inferior to butter, their [bone] marrow is equal to the best of butter."

Carver also noted that Indians made bottles out of buffalo bladders and skins. Finally, he wrote that in the vicinity of the St. Croix and Chippewa Rivers in northwest Wisconsin, near the Upper Peninsula border, "One thing well worth notice in these parts is the wool of the buffalo which is long and fine and can certainly be manufactured into cloth."⁴ In this latter statement either there were buffalo in the area that were hunted and their woolly hide was used or the hide was traded.

The final account buffalo in the north country comes from the metis historian, interpreter and legislator in Minnesota territory, William W. Warren (1825-1853). He was one of the first historians to understand and utilize oral tradition or interviews, which he gathered from Ojibwa people.

Prior to his death he had interviewed Ojibwa whose histories allowed him to write:

The more hardy and adventurous hunted on the lake [Superior] shore opposite their village [at La Pointe, Wisconsin], which was overrun with moose, bear, elk, and deer. The buffalo, also, are said in those days [c1820s-1830s] to have ranged within a half a day's march from the lake [Superior] shore, on the barrens stretching towards the headwaters of the St. Croix River.⁵

In conclusion, it is of interest to note that these accounts developed in 1660, 1766, and 1830s approximately a century apart. Also by 1800 bison were no longer sighted in the eastern United States. However from

these accounts we can safely say that some bison broke from the herd and found their way into the Upper Peninsula by 1660.

Unfortunately our documentation concerning the range of these animals is limited. They certainly could have entered the heart and eastern end of Upper Peninsula at later dates but no one left an account. Their appearance in the UP is similar to wild cats that are showing up today having traveled distances from their homes in the west.

Editor's Note: The following page is an article written by Harold S. Riter for The Ontonagon Herald in 2023.

High Hopes for the Caledonia

With the recent news about the Copperwood Mine project and the high hopes for the White Pine North, it might be a good time to look at another mining venture which has been almost forgotten.

In 1952, the mighty Calumet & Hecla Consolidated Copper Company decided to take another plunge into Ontonagon County mining properties. C & H had earlier, partially owned and operated the white Pine, but in view of falling copper prices, following WWI, as well as the difficulty of trying to free copper from the difficult chalcocite ore, they had thrown in the towel and let the property go to a tax sale in 1929. The White Pine was picked up "for a song" by Copper Range who then worked out the special methods of extracting the very fine particles of copper from the surrounding rock and made a success of a property that had been formerly been written off as worthless.

During and following the Korean conflict, the need for developing copper reserves became a priority of the US government. C & H owned several other properties in Ontonagon County, one of them being the old Caledonia Mine located just off the Ridge Road on an old section of the Military Road between Greenland and Rockland just northwest of Mass City.

The performance of the Caledonia was not spectacular, in fact it had been absorbed by the Flintsteel Mine in 1871

and it had cost the owners \$140,000 before they finally gave up on it. C & H decided to try to develop some of the old Mass Consolidated workings and the Caledonia seemed to be a likely mine to try to work.

Beginning in 1952, C & H had a crew exploring the Caledonia adit. The Caledonia was worked through an adit in the side of the hill that extended over 2,500 feet from the portal. It is said that some of the stopes were 300 feet high or more, and underground it actually extended into the main part of the Mass Consolidated workings.

According to an article that appeared in the Daily Mining Gazette on Sunday, January 6, 1952, Mr. Gerald Warrener, project manager said that he had hope that within a few days they would know the richness of the ore coming out of the Caledonia adit. "I think copper content will run fairly high," Warrener was quoted as saying.

He further said that the ore from the company's seven mines in this Upper Peninsula has a copper content of about 20 pounds (copper) per ton. Warrener was of the opinion that the Caledonia may produce ore of a higher copper content.

There was wild speculation that the Caledonia may rival the White Pine which was well along in development. White Pine was expected to produce 37,500 tons of copper a year when in full operation 3 years in the future. This would account for about 4% of the total copper output in the United States.

New exploratory mining operations at the Caledonia had actually begun in December of 1951. Access roads were repaired or upgraded, power lines had been run, and the Caledonia shaft was put in shape. The adit through which work was progressing had actually been driven in 1937 and had been worked briefly until 1940. Two hundred tons of rock per day were coming out of the Caledonia in early 1952 and was then trucked to Lake Mine where it was carried to the C & H Mills at Hubbell via the Copper Range R.R. If the copper content warranted, some of the milling would be done on site which meant new con-

struction and more jobs. In January of 1952, there were 25 men employed.

C & H was cautiously optimistic but the copper deposits were spotty; very rich in some places and in others quite lean. The copper was sometimes found in fissures rather than in veins or lodes. The Caledonia is located on the Knowlton Lode and the men had encountered large chunks of native (mass) copper. (There is a 1,200 pound chunk of copper that is in the possession of the Ontonagon County Historical Society which was presented to OCHS by Mr. Tom Pestka several years ago.)

C & H had applied for a \$3,500,000 government loan from the Defense Minerals Administration but at the time of this news release nothing had been heard of whether this was funded or not. The Defense Minerals Administration had loaned \$57 million to Copper Range and allowed Copper Range to write off more than \$28 million of the cost as well, for the development of the White Pine.

Mass or fissure copper production, however, was pretty much a thing of the past and the Caledonia's copper deposits were not consistent enough to allow it to compete with other modern mines that were working with lower grade ores, but with highly efficient extraction methods.

The Caledonia remained a small operation with sporadic output and C & H finally suspended operations in 1958.

During its time of limited operation, a tragic explosion on August 27, 1956 occurred that took the lives of two of the miners and injured several others.

According to Mr. Onni Maki, the shift boss on that fateful day, the morning crew started work at 7:00 am on that Monday morning. The older parts of the mine were full of rotting timbers which were a source of explosive methane gas. In fact, the mine had several pockets of methane gas.

Maki recalled that there had been some reluctance on the part of some of the mining crew that morning because of the methane gas that had been detected prior to this time in the Caledonia. Maki asked about the whereabouts of the methane gas tester and was told that it had been left at the rear of the mine rather than near the entry portal where it was

usually kept. It was Buck Hayes, who would soon die in the explosion, who informed Maki that the gas tester had been left deep inside the mine by the last shift.

Maki led the work crew himself into the mine. Besides himself, there were eight others. The crew rode in on a 2-car electric tram to a point just past the "D" shaft, about 2,500 feet from the portal. At this point the cars derailed because of a loose rail. The rail was repaired, but the tram was left in place. Six of the men walked further into the mine, and two of them entered a fresh air stope to work there.

Maki was in the stope directing one of the men as to what he wanted done, and while they were talking, a series of gas explosions were heard and concussions were felt.

"We went down right away and smoke was coming out of that drift," Maki said. He found two men, badly burned, with skin hanging: he led them out of the mine to the dry (change room) and then went back into the mine.

"I didn't hear anything until I found a man lying on the track, moaning. I stood by him for awhile and then went back to get help to carry him out," Maki recalled. He called on two men to help him and they followed him into the mine a short distance, and then turned back. The smoke was too thick and the air was bad. Maki continued on alone to an injured man, who turned out to be Buck Hayes. Hayes, age 51, was a large man and too heavy for him to lift alone. "His head was in the water, so I took my jacket off and put it under his head. I stayed with him for awhile, talking to him waiting for help to arrive, and then I began to feel sick myself." Onni Maki has no memory of how he got out of the mine, but he was later told that he walked out under his own power before passing out completely. He was taken to the Ontonagon Memorial Hospital where he regained consciousness but was told that he had experienced convulsions and a man had to hold his head down to keep him from hitting it on the floor.

Maki said that the only reason he found Buck Hayes was because he was

lying on the tram tracks. Hayes died from his injuries. The other fatality was Hugo Lukkari, age 36, who was found later and it is believed that he died instantly when the explosion took place.

What caused the explosion? The official story was that an electric spark from the tram ignited the gas. There was water running from the portal of the mine. The water was supposed to be channeled out through "D" shaft but for some reason, the water had been routed down the tramway tracks and out of the portal. No one ever accepted responsibility for routing the water down the tracks. The methane gas, which was carried by the water, traveled down the open track rather than being confined in a closed hose line as was the proper procedure. Also, as previously mentioned the gas tester was not near the portal, but far to the rear of the work area. It was this single tester that was to be used to test for methane gas and it was not left in its proper location to be available to test for gas.

What actually caused the gas to explode? Maki told this reporter several years ago that after he returned to work following two weeks in the hospital, he discovered what he feels was the real cause. Upon returning to work, he "poked around" in the mine for a bit and found an open Zippo lighter in one of the stopes. He feels that one of the workers lit a cigarette which ignited the gas in the mine. Foreman Maki located the owner of the lighter who admitted that he had used it just before the explosion. The owner of the lighter was one of the men who had suffered severe burns.

John Turpeinen was a member of the work crew that went into the Caledonia that morning. Turpeinen said that there was a smoking ban in the place and no one was supposed to be using an open flame underground.

There was never a hearing or inquest regarding the matter and C & H was never found to be responsible, though they paid for the medical expenses of the injured.



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

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