



The County Historian

News from the Ontonagon County Historical Society

Dean Juntunen, Editor

Spring 2025

OCHS
422 River St
Ontonagon, MI 49953
ochs@jamadots.com
906-884-6165

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. OCHS is geared up for another busy summer tourism season. Both our Museum and Lighthouse will be open 7 days per week starting on Saturday, May 24, 2025.

Museum hours are 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Lighthouse hours are 11:00 am to 3:00 pm.

Museum admission is \$5 per adult. Children are free.

Lighthouse admission is \$7 per adult. Children are free. This is a new entry amount for the Lighthouse this year.

Karen Sells continues as our Museum Manager, Brandi Steiner continues as Collections Manager, and our 3 museum cashiers return this year: Linda Graham, Dan DeFoy, and Ken Gardner.

At the Lighthouse, we are staffed by volunteers. We could use more tour guides — one for Mondays, and one or two who would be willing to fill in if our regular guides are not able to attend a shift. If you're interested, contact the museum at 906-884-6165 or ochs@jamadots.com. Our people report that managing the

self-guided tours at the lighthouse is a rewarding experience. Or, if you prefer mowing lawn, we will provide a riding mower for the lighthouse grounds.

NEWS TIDBITS

Last November, we had 11 of 12 board seats filled. Since that time, we've added new board member Robin Hammer Mueller who lives in the lost corner of Ontonagon County — Misery Bay. Robin is an expert on the tools of the Ancient Miners in what is now the western UP.

Local author Denise Vandeville compiled a book titled *A View of The Century Past/1887-1997/Laird Township Centennial*. She gave us a copy, which we've added to our collection. Nisula and Alston are in Laird Township, Houghton County.

We proofread drafts from two other authors, and sent them a few pertinent digital photos. Author Larry Wright is creating a detailed publication on Lighthouses of the Great Lakes, and he shared his draft chapter on Ontonagon.

Christopher Stefano is writing two lengthy articles for a Mineral Magazine — one on Ontonagon County Mines, and one on the White Pine Mine all by itself — and Stefano shared his drafts with us, too. In the past, Stefano had written a lengthy article on Copper Country Mines, with detailed, footnoted information.

KEWEENAW HERITAGE SITE GRANT

Once again, the Keweenaw National Historical Park Advisory Commission has awarded us with an annual grant. The amount for

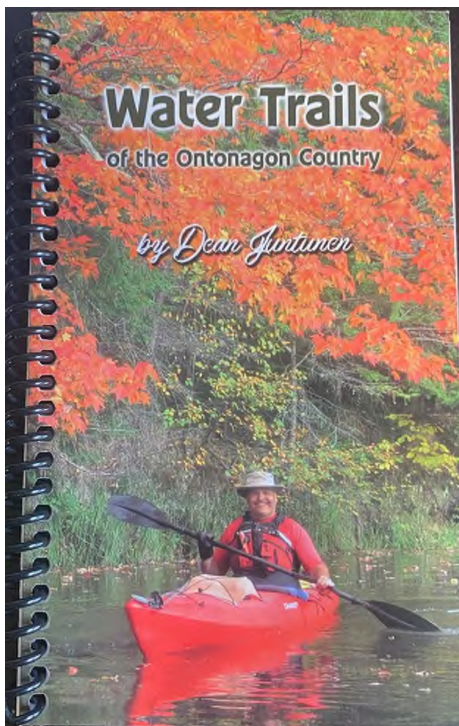


Our museum sports new roofing on the mansard front for the tourism season of 2025 — installed by contractor Kody Store in April. Kody also removed the old defunct brick chimney from the museum to preclude any damage from spalling bricks to our Durolast rubber-like membrane on the flat portion of the roof.

2025/2026 is \$13,600. We thank our grant writer Fern Malila who completed a superb application to continue our cataloging and collections management work. Collections Manager Brandi will be busy for another year, and we plan to tackle our storage in Mass City. Almost none of that has been cataloged yet.

PADDLING GUIDE FOR THE ONTONAGON COUNTRY

We ordered 500 waterproof copies of a paddlers guide to Ontonagon County and adjacent rivers. They are available in our museum shop this tourism season. The water trails guide was originally published by MI-TRALE in their area trail book. Photos and descriptions by Dean Juntunen.



MACC GRANT 2025

Fern Malila wrote a grant for us from the Michigan Arts and Culture Council (MACC). They awarded us \$6,863 to be used to-

ward an accessible viewing platform at the Sheryl-Dennis fish tug on our lighthouse grounds. The project must be completed by the end of September 2025.

We will have to provide a match of about \$7,000 ourselves in order to fund the viewing platform. Thus, Fern Malila is spearheading a fundraiser for our match. Donations can be sent to OCHS, 422 River St, Ontonagon, MI 49953.

Trident Marine Systems is donating custom steel cradles to provide permanent supports for the Sheryl-Dennis. Then after our contractor finishes the accessible viewing platform, we'll add interpretive signage and we'll display old commercial fishing gear inside the fish tug.

JON RIEGER PHOTO SHOOT 2025

Dr Jon Rieger was a sociologist from the University of Louisville, KY who started a photo project in Ontonagon County in 1970. He photographed every business, municipal building, or other significant scene in Ontonagon County and the project became a quinquennial photo shoot, meaning that he re-took photographs every 5 years, using the same angles and time of day, thereby documenting historical change through photographs.

Prior to his passing, Dr Rieger established a foundation in Louisville to fund his Ontonagon County photo shoot in perpetuity. In the year 2020, photographer Nathan Miller of Chassell became our contractor for the Rieger Project.

Now in 2025, Nathan Miller is on contract again, so if you see a white Toyota Tacoma pickup hanging around the county with a

guy taking pictures, that's Nathan. Nathan is young enough that he could conceivably fulfill the Rieger Project for the next 30 years or so.



LIGHTHOUSE NEWS

Over the winter, Dave Bishop finished construction of new cedar shutters for the lighthouse. John Doyle then painted the shutters green, and they are ready for installation. Our guys will rent a man-lift to accomplish the installation.

John Doyle also constructed a new screen door for our visitor's entrance at the lighthouse.

Laura Burke did a fabulous job creating new signage to be posted in all rooms at the lighthouse, giving a brief history of each. Laura also designed a large interpretive sign to be posted outside, explaining what the caisson is. The caisson was used to provide a dry workspace during installation of the water intake for the White Pine Mine offshore from Silver City. The intake is still working today in the regional water system. The caisson stands ready for maintenance duty if needed. See below.



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

27 Spiral Steps \$300 each
Master Bedroom \$5,000
1st-flr 1890's kitchen \$6,000



PAST DINNER PROGRAMS

November — Jerry Koski responsible. Kristin Ojaniemi presented one of her Discovering episodes from TV-6, featuring Dave Stimac, who had worked in the sawmill at Alberta. The Ford mill opened September 1, 1936, and the village of Alberta was to be a model town featuring sustainable industry.

The name “Alberta” came from Alberta Johnson, the daughter of Henry Ford’s UP operations superintendent. Ford’s timberlands surrounding Alberta were never clear-cut. Instead, Ford employed scientific management of the forest with select cutting from the outset.

A dam on Plumbago Creek created Plumbago Lake, which is still intact today alongside Highway US-41. In the early days of Alberta, the lake provided water for the mill pond. Today it is a popular recreational site.

In 1954, Henry Ford donated the village and mill to what is now Michigan Tech, as well as about 1,700 acres of working forest. That forest is now part of the 5,500-acre Ford Forest, which is managed scientifically by Michigan Tech.

The mill at Alberta is no longer used, but it still stands as a

museum. Dave Stimac does marvelous bird-eye maple wood-working projects at present-day Alberta, and multiple people still live there. In essence, Henry Ford’s model community lives on.

December — Bill Chabot responsible. Bill presented his own *Unique American Holidays and Celebrations*. He took us around the calendar, starting with Thanksgiving. Everyone knows the popular holidays of course, but Bill found some more obscure ones.

For example, April 17 is officially Blah Blah Blah Day. There is also a Squirrel Appreciation Day, and a National Penguin Awareness Day. In early January comes Toss Out Your Fruitcake Day.

Bill highlighted some unique UP celebrations, like the annual Wife Carrying Contest at Heikinpaiva in Hancock; and the annual Outhouse Races in Trenary where participants mount outhouses on skis and then push them down main street as fast as possible.

Did you know that there is a Missing Sock Day? Or that Button Gwinnett’s signature on the Declaration of Independence is most valuable? One of his signatures recently sold for \$722,500 at Sotheby’s in New York.

The last of the oddities is that October 26 is Worldwide Howl At the Moon Night.

Bill Chabot always personally researches his unique programs, and if you missed his show at the historical society dinner, you have the option of catching it next year at the Ontonagon Library.

January — John Doyle responsible. John presented *Cruising Lake Superior on the Family Affair*, featuring Isle Royale. Back when John and Pat Doyle were raising children, they bought a 30-foot ma-

hogany boat called *Family Affair*. John’s friend, Tom Rosemurgy, had his own boat called *Gnat*. Together, they motored the 80 miles to Isle Royale from Ontonagon on multiple occasions. They launched from Ontonagon on an azimuth heading of 5 degrees, which guaranteed that even in the fog they wouldn’t overshoot the west end of Isle Royale.

John took us on a pictorial journey around the island, starting at Windigo on the west end, then looping along the south side to Rock Harbor, and then looping back on the north side, with a quick side-trip up to Otter Cove in Canada on the Black Bay Peninsula. John reports that the bugs in Canada were so bad that they didn’t make it an extended stay. It was okay if he was in the boat or in the water, but otherwise, the bugs were vicious. The crossing to Canada from Isle Royale is much shorter than the crossing from Ontonagon — about ¼ the distance.

John included a photo from 1973 of a couple who were commercially fishing on the south side of Isle Royale, Elaine and Sam Rude. They all became friends.

Regarding the unusual, John caught a photo of a moose swimming in Siskiwit Bay, Isle Royale; and, he had a photo of a sea plane that came to rescue a young man who needed medical attention. John and company had teamed up to get the young man to a dock accessible by sea plane.

John also included several photos from Passage Island, off the east end of Isle Royale. Passage Island boasted a very nice stone lighthouse including a supply tramway, a helipad, and a swimming beach on the north side.

Isle Royale is actually a part of Keweenaw County. Between



Elaine and Sam Rude, Fishermans Home, Isle Royale, July 1973

Grand Portage, MN and Windigo, Isle Royale -- out in the waters of Lake Superior, Michigan and Minnesota share a border.

So if anyone ever asks which states border Michigan, the answer is Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. The Illinois border is out in the southern end of Lake Michigan.

February — Kristin Ojaniemi responsible. Kristin presented her 7th and 8th episodes of *Born in the Barn*. These are the final episodes of her documentary on the old gymnasium in Ewen. The series evolved into a history of Basketball at Ewen-Trout Creek schools.

Her 7th episode highlighted the accomplishments of basketball coaches at E-TC. The boys had only three coaches over the years since 1968: Rudy Perhalla, Tom Caudill, and Brad Besonen. Coach Caudill had more wins than any other UP basketball coach. The girls also had only three coaches. Betty Nilsson, Nancy Osier, and Jacky Besonen. Nancy Osier has the most wins of any UP girls coach. Jacky and Brad Besonen are husband and wife, and to this

day both are still coaching E-TC basketball.

Kristin's 8th episode featured the boys team from 2022, a team that made it to the championship game in Class D at the Breslin Center, with regulation play ending in a tie. Alas, the E-TC boys lost in overtime. Theirs was a true team,

with all five starters contributing handily. Their methods worked, even when playing the best teams in the state of Michigan.

March — Dave Bishop responsible. Local historian Brandon Erickson presented his own *Collecting Mining-Era Domestic Trash and Appreciating 100-Year Old Garbage*.

Many of the treasures that Brandon finds are old bottles. He's a member of a group called Copper Country Bottle Collectors, which started in 1973. Over 50 companies produced unique bottles, many with dozens of variations. Bottles were first made locally in the 1870's and became widespread by the early 1900's.

Brandon uses LiDAR maps (Light Detection and Ranging) which show topography very well to find promising excavation locations, such as old foundation holes. Aerial imagery is also useful for finding promising sites, especially older aerial imagery from the 1930's before the brush and trees grew back too much.

The three main types of bottle tops are Applied Top, Tooled Top, and Crown Top. In the modern

IN MEMORIAM

On a somber note, we recognize the Ontonagon County Historical Society Members who have passed on in recent history, honoring them in our memories. They are sorely missed.

Bob Aho
Ellie Burgess
Jim Countryman
Genevieve Hill
David Jaris
Tom Lee
Jean Lind
Rebecca Zartner

Plus, we received a Special Memorial for Harvey Peterson from David Smydra

day, we see all Crown Tops. There are also Hutchinson bottles and Cork Top bottles.

Unusual local bottles include *John Turin & Son* from Mass City from the early 1900's. Also *Turin & Partanen* from Mass City.

Other treasures found by Brandon include decorative stoneware, sleigh bells, an old pistol, and an old carbide lamp. Brandon also finds pieces of ornate tobacco pipes.

Brandon's next mission is to find a complete embossed bottle from Union Bottling Works, of which the Riddle family was proprietor. Riddle Junction was a community between Mass City and Rockland circa 1900.

April — Jean Eckloff responsible. Ken Raisanen presented on the history of the WOAS FM radio station at the high school. Ken reports that Tom Lee put in super-

lative time and effort to establish the station in the 1970's. The first broadcast was December 15, 1978 at 8:00 a.m., and the equipment used at that time included reel-to-reel tapes and record turntables.

In 1985, Margret Muskatt succeeded Tom Lee as manager. In 1987, the Community Schools program under Mike Bennett took over, bringing increased funding and resources.

When the Community Schools program ceased to exist in the mid 1990's, funding declined and the station was operated by volunteers. Ken Raisanen took over management of the station.

Having an FM radio station in a small high school is unique, but Ken and volunteers kept plugging away until a religious radio station decided to take over the 88.5 frequency. Per FCC rules, larger wattage stations can claim the frequency from low-wattage stations. Thus, WOAS was forced to move to 91.5.

However, that move is an enormous, complex, expensive undertaking, which is not quite complete. The move is happening though, thanks to help from the Detroit Free Press and author Mitch Albom, who took up the cause and spurred a fundraiser for a tiny radio station in the UP on the chopping block. Donations flooded in from all over Michigan and beyond. NBC Nightly News with Kinjal Patel did a little segment on WOAS. Y101 helped out, too. CommonFrequency.org stepped in to accomplish the voluminous paperwork with the FCC. The physical work of installing new equipment was accomplished by Jim Bradley and Al Harrison. Jim Bradley has a long history of helping WOAS with radio equipment. School Librarian Betsy

Guilbault and main DJ Lee McCaffery are instrumental, too.

Thanks to the wide support, WOAS will be broadcasting on 91.5 FM soon. At the moment, WOAS is available only via online streaming at www.woas-fm.org.

May — Sally Berman responsible. Sally presented an interesting historical story connecting Ontonagon to the Pictographs at Agawa Bay, Ontario, on the east shore of Lake Superior about 100 miles north of Sault Ste. Marie. The Pictographs are within the boundaries of Lake Superior Provincial Park, and a quite rugged hiking trail is available for those wishing to access the pictographs from the land. Otherwise, a paddle craft is the easiest way to see them.

The pictographs tell the story of a Native American battle from circa 1600. The red ochre images include the mythical Mishipeshu, also known as The Great Lynx. The legends say that when Mishipeshu was angered, he'd thrash his mighty tail, stirring up big waves on Lake Superior.

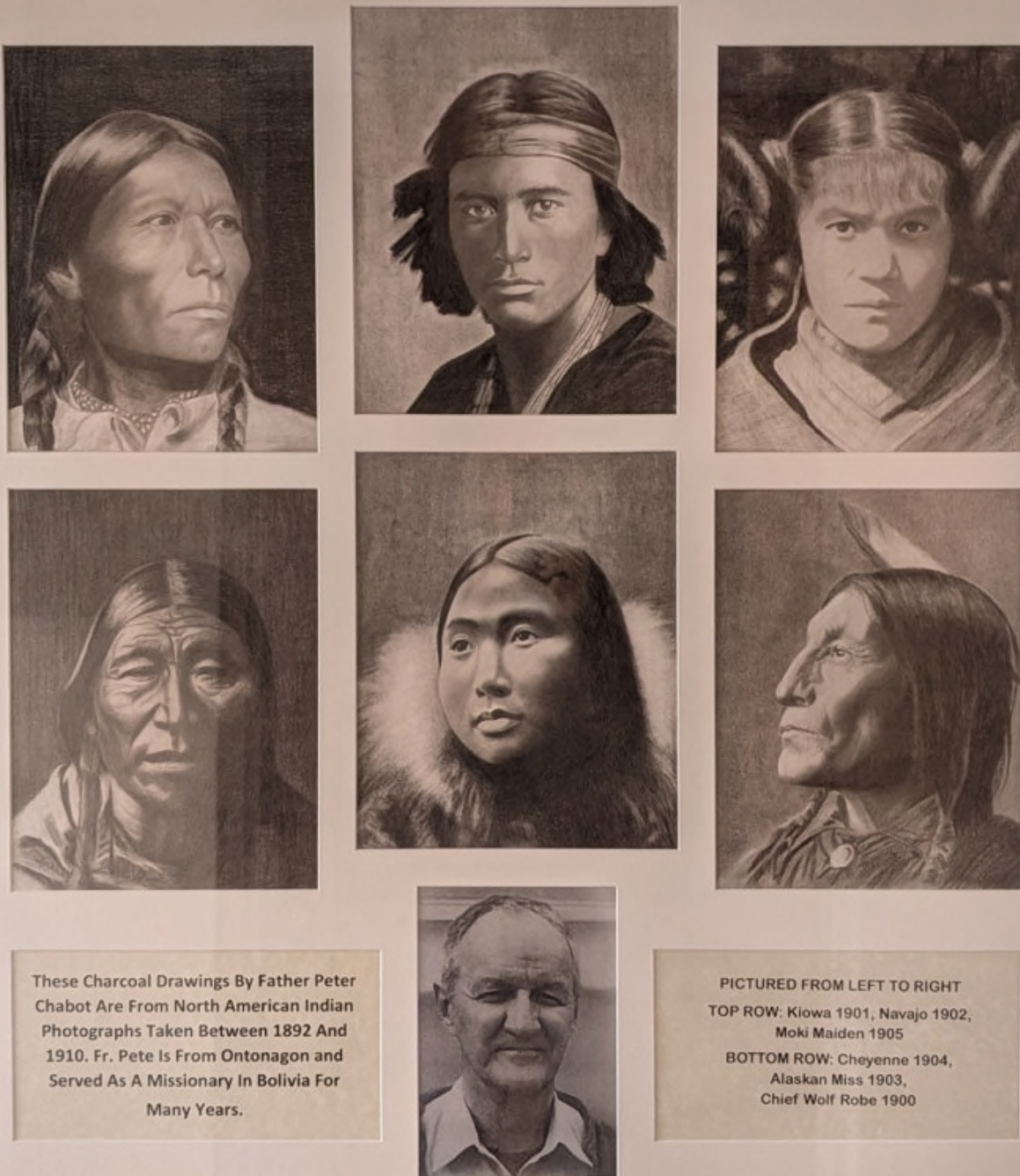
Today, if the waves are big on Lake Superior, there is no safe viewing of the Agawa Pictographs

by sea or by land. When viewing them from land, you are standing on a narrow rock ledge only a couple feet above lake level. People have drowned after being washed off the rock ledge, unable to scale the vertical wall to get back onto the ledge. The sheer cliff offers no landing sites in a storm.

When Henry Rowe Schoolcraft explored the UP in Michigan's earliest days, a local Ojibwa chief told him the story of Myeengun from the 1600s. Myeengun was a powerful Ojibwa Chief of a band residing on today's Carp River in the Porcupine Mountains. Myeengun gathered 50 warriors and they paddled canoes from their home to Agawa Bay in 4 days (hence the 4 red ochre suns painted on the Agawa Cliffs). At Agawa, Myeengun's band teamed up with an Agawa band to forcibly oust the invading Iroquois. Legend says that magic was involved, resulting in the drowning of the Iroquois. The story of the canoes and the battle was painted onto the Agawa Cliffs in red ochre.

The incredible durability of the ochre is due to the addition of fish oil and animal fats to the iron oxide in the Native American paint.





These charcoal drawings are on display in our museum in the hallway between the front and back rooms in the central area of the building. Our board member Bill Chabot, who is a brother to Father Peter, facilitated adding this fine display to our collection. The frame is approximately 2 feet wide x 3 feet tall.



422 River St
Ontonagon, MI 49953

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

**If you prefer your newsletter via e-mail as a pdf,
send a note to deanjunt@jamadots.com. With
the zoom capabilities of pdf viewers, pdfs are
easier to read, and the pictures are of better
quality.**