



The County Historian

News from the Ontonagon County Historical Society

Dean Juntunen, Editor

Spring 2026

OCHS
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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. 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 23, 2026.

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.

Combined admission for both the museum and lighthouse is \$10 per adult, children are free. This is a new entry deal for this year.

Karen Sells continues as our Museum Manager, Brandi Steiner continues as Collections Manager, and the very popular Linda Graham returns as a museum cashier. Meanwhile, cashiers Ken Gardner and Dan DeFoy have moved on to other pursuits this summer and we will miss them. Fortunately, new cashiers Heidi Wettberg and Marlene Broemer are here for the season.

At the Lighthouse, we are staffed by volunteers. We could

use more tour guides, willing to fill in if our regular guides are not able to attend a shift — say two or three shifts per month. If you're interested, contact the museum at 906-884-6165 or ochs@jamadots.com.

Karen Sells encourages teens to volunteer as cashiers at our Lighthouse. It's a meaningful volunteer activity and looks good on a resume.

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.

KEWEENAW HERITAGE SITE GRANT

Once again, the Keweenaw National Historical Park Advisory Commission has awarded us with an annual grant. The amount for 2026/2027 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. We hope to wrap up the lion's share of this multi-year project at some point in 2027.

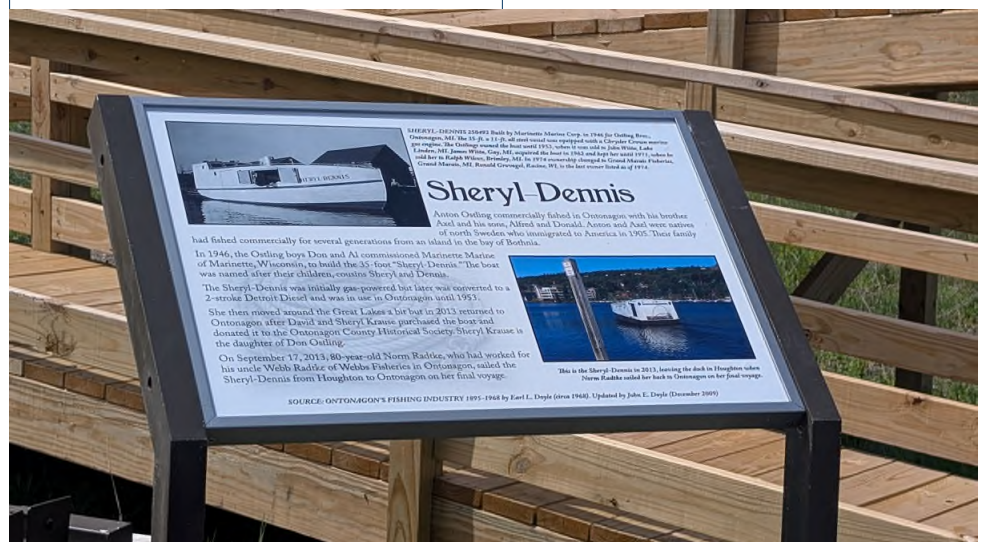
The Keweenaw National Historical Park has been a key part of the success of OCHS since the formation of the park.

LIGHTHOUSE NEWS

We have new interpretive signs at the Sheryl-Dennis fish tug on the lighthouse grounds. We also have a doggie bag station for pets who need to do their business on our grounds.

The lighthouse is nicely lit inside with LED lights thanks to a 200-watt solar panel and a 600W power station.

We also have a 100-watt solar



New interpretive sign at our ramp for viewing the Sheryl-Dennis fish tug on the Lighthouse grounds.



New interpretive sign at the bow of the Sheryl-Dennis fish tug on our Lighthouse grounds. If you haven't been to the lighthouse recently, we highly recommend a visit.

panel and a small power station for the Sheryl-Dennis whose interior will be lit soon. Commercial fishing gear will be on display inside the boat.

This year we are celebrating the 160th anniversary of the brick lighthouse which went into service in 1866. Below is our banner on

Highway M-64. The lighthouse is in remarkably good condition for being 160 years old.

We do have two lighthouse windows in poor condition though, and we will be replacing them this summer utilizing our own funds. Eventually we will replace the remaining eight lighthouse windows, too, but we'll wait to find grant funds for those. Marvin Windows is willing to custom-build historical single-pane windows.

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

27 Spiral Steps
\$300 ea

Master Bedroom
\$5,000

1st-flr 1890's
Kitchen \$6,000



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.

- Alexandra Jaris
- Mary Ann Spetz
- Tom Strong
- Rebecca Zartner

NEWS ITEMS

Water Line Repair -- We had an apparent water leak under the pavement behind the museum, so our water was shut down for a couple of winter months. After spring thaw, we opened the ground for repair and found that it was actually the Village shut-off valve leaking. Nonetheless, while our feed line was exposed, we had Ron Weiner replace it as it was in poor condition. We received \$200 from UPPCO and \$1,000 from SEMCO to help with the cost of the repairs.

Keweenaw National Historical Park Volunteer Fair – This event is set for June 12-13 during Bridgefest, and we will staff the park table for an hour on Saturday the 13th.

Country Lines Article – A writer from Country Lines magazine will feature our Ontonagon Lighthouse in an article to be published in August. We collaborated with the writer in crafting the article.

Acquisitions — One recent incoming item of interest was an Ontonagon Blue Devils basketball

jersey. A recent Ontonagon Herald had an item about the Blue Devils in the “100 years ago” column. It was an adult basketball team. The jersey is now on display in our sports cabinet for this year’s tourism season.

Zartner Family Trust — Jim and Rebecca Zartner had named the Ontonagon County Historical Society as a beneficiary in their personal trust, and now that both of them are deceased, we have received \$19,900. We’ve been doing well financially in recent years thanks to the generosity of people like the Zartners. If you’re interested in special donations to OCHS, please visit our website for options – ontonagonmuseum.org. Click on the Donate button and then follow the link for additional ways to donate.



PAST DINNER PROGRAMS

November 2025 — Dave Stimac of Alberta, who once operated the sawmill there, presented on Ford’s operations at Alberta. The Ford mill opened September 1, 1936, and the village of Alberta was to be a model town featuring sustainable industry. It was named after Alberta Johnson, daughter of Ford’s superintendent of UP Operations at that time.

Ford utilized scientific management of the forest around Alberta, with purely selective logging. In 1954, Henry Ford no longer needed wood for his manufacturing operations, so he donated the Alberta 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. Dave Stimac says, “It is just a beautiful forest.”

Dave Stimac has a good eye for beauty, as he creates numerous wooden works of art featuring bird-eye maple. Dave sells hand-crafted furniture and knick-knacks in the gift shop at Alberta.

The current “town” of Alberta has 12 houses and a dormitory. Last summer the dormitory housed 56 Tech students. Alberta has about 20 year-round residents. Dave Stimac operates the municipal water system.

Regarding mill operations back in the day, Dave describes it as “dustless.” All the sawdust was removed via a conveyor system and fed into a steam boiler, which powered the whole operation. Dave says that the Alberta mill once cut wood for gliders in WWII. The gliders, or flivvers, were assembled in Kingsford.

Now recently, Dave reports that the Louisiana Pacific company donated LP SmartSide siding to refurbish the buildings in Alberta.

Dave told us his favorite little story about Alberta Johnson. Alberta was an excellent tennis player, and Henry Ford liked her, so he said that if she would enter and win a tennis tournament in Ann Arbor, he would give her a brand-new Ford automobile for free. Alberta won that tournament. But alas, Henry Ford up and died on her, so she never did get that free car. Dave showed us a photo of Alberta Johnson taken in Alberta when she visited as a much older woman.

In closing, Dave Stimac invited everyone to stop in at the gift shop in Alberta sometime. If he’s not present in the gift shop when you get there, he’ll be in one of the two buildings next door.

December 2025 — Bill Chabot presented his own *American Ingenuity and Potpourri*. Bill noted that America is well-known for its ingenuity, which is distinctly different from Belgium.

Belgium is mostly known for Belgian Waffles. Meanwhile, in America you see things like The Naked Cowboy playing his guitar in his underwear on a snowy New York City street; and, on Mackinac Island we have people whose job is scooping horse poop. Mind you, motor vehicles are not allowed on the island, so the poop scoopers use tricycles with a large poop bin between the back tires.

Egypt had the Great Library of Alexandria, but only elites could enter that library. Meanwhile, in America practically anyone can access the Library of Congress. And 100 years ago, philanthropist Andrew Carnegie donated funds for over 1,600 public libraries in the US, aiming to provide educational opportunities for working-class people, inspired by his own childhood access to books. Not all ingenuity is lofty though. Americans also popularized Donut Holes, Tarzan, and Bungee Jumping.

In ordinary life, we used to have the Sears Roebuck catalog, from which you could mail-order practically anything. In terms of commerce, the Sears catalog was in essence an analog internet.

In aviation, America went from the first rickety flight of the Wright Brothers to a modern B2 Stealth Bomber.

America included heroes of course, such as Charles Lindbergh; but we also had anti-heroes, such as Wrong Way Corrigan. Douglas Corrigan was an aviator who in 1938 completed a transcontinental flight from Long Beach, CA to New York City. His flight plan said he’d return to Long Beach, but when he left Brooklyn, he then flew to Ireland!

Wrong Way Corrigan claimed his unauthorized flight to Ireland was due to a navigational error caused by heavy cloud cover that obscured landmarks and by misreading his compass in low-light conditions. However, he was a skilled aircraft mechanic who had helped construct Charles Lindbergh’s Spirit of St Louis, and Wrong Way Corrigan made several modifications to his own plane, preparing it for his illicit transatlantic flight. Since he

had been denied permission to make a nonstop flight from New York to Ireland, his "navigational error" was seen as deliberate. He never publicly admitted to having flown to Ireland intentionally though, and the "Wrong Way Corrigan" nickname stuck.

In 1968, Spencer Silver, a scientist at 3M in the US was trying to create a super-strong adhesive. Instead he produced a low-tack, reusable adhesive, which he promoted for years within 3M as a "solution looking for a problem." Nothing came of it until 1974 when an attendee from one of Silver's seminars, Arthur Fry, thought to use the adhesive to anchor his bookmark in a book he was reading. A team of 3M scientists then grabbed some yellow scrap paper which happened to be available in the lab, and voila! The original yellow Post-it Note was born, though the name came later. Post-It Notes became widely used in the US in 1980, and still today they're used in practically every home and business in the US.

Last, Bill Chabot told us a story about Irene Wolfe, former editor of the Ontonagon Herald, who scooped the national press when President Eisenhower was on vacation in the Sylvania Wilderness Area (Snapjack Lake). Eisenhower had refused to engage with the national press during this vacation. Irene Wolfe engaged her connections to make a phone call and asked if she could come to interview the president. Surprisingly, Ike said, "Yes." The story was seen first in the Ontonagon Herald.

January 2026 — John Doyle presented a thorough slide show on the grandest of all UP copper mines, the White Pine Mine, from 1952 until its closure in 1997.

John opened with a slide of the Keweenaw Peninsula, showing the locations of older Copper Mines, all of which broke copper masses out of rock with industrial stamps, leaving behind "stamp sand," which is a coarse dark gray material. Environmental regulations in the old Copper Country were minimal, and much of

the stamp sand was simply deposited into Lake Superior, Portage Lake, or wherever was convenient. Torch Lake near Lake Linden-Hubbell later became an EPA Superfund site. The stamp sands in Gay fouled the Buffalo Reef in Lake Superior, which is fish breeding ground. John noted that the White Pine Mine minimized environmental damages by building massive Tailings Dams right from the get-go.

His presentation included over 100 photos from the White Pine Mine, starting with the water intake shaft that was dug under Lake Superior at Silver City. The intake head is over a quarter mile offshore. A 36-inch water main carried the water up to White Pine. Later, a second 36-inch water line was installed. The current Regional Water System still utilizes the Silver City water intake and the water mains.

The White Pine tailings dams alone were a large construction project. If you look at an aerial view of Ontonagon County on Google, you can see that the tailings dams were much larger than Bond Lake. The only bigger body of inland water in Ontonagon County is Lake Gogebic.

The 502-foot smokestack at White Pine went up at the same time that the portal was dug in and the power house, smelter, and other facilities were erected. White Pine had a smelter because instead of mining copper masses, chalcocite sulfide ore was mined. The copper-bearing layer was as much as 18 feet high.

White Pine saw mechanized mining on a grand scale. The footprint of the mine underground was approximately 8 miles east to west and 7 miles north to south. John Doyle projected a map showing the footprint as a dotted line. He also projected a map from 1995 showing the status of the mine at that time, including every cell that had been mined out, and showing several caved-in areas, where remaining support pillars had been mined out.

John showed photos of all the equipment used over the years, including drilling rigs, roof bolters, end loaders, graders, ore cars, the conveyor belt

system, and personnel transport vehicles. The equipment was built low so that they could negotiate low-clearance routes in the mine. Later, an 18-foot diameter boring machine came in as sort of an experiment. It wasn't crucial to the mine's development or operation.

In its heyday, the White Pine Mine had 3,000 employees. Total production amounted to approximately four billion pounds of copper and 45 million ounces of silver. In its later days, a new Electrolytic Refinery was constructed, which produced 99.9% pure copper. Since the railroad that had been built to serve the White Pine Mine was no longer running in the later days, the electrolytically refined copper was shipped out on trucks. In looking at a flatbed semi loaded with copper, it seems to be a small load, but due to the extreme density of copper, it's as heavy a load as the roads will allow.

John closed with an aerial view of the White Pine Mine when it was near its end in 1995. Since John Doyle had been an employee in the White Pine himself, his presentation was simply outstanding. Kristin Ojaniemi recorded a video of the presentation, which we have archived in the museum on a USB stick and also in the cloud on our One Drive.

February 2026 — Kristin Ojaniemi showed a video of her Discovering episode on the Sylvania Wilderness Area near Watersmeet. We also had three guest presenters from the Land O' Lakes Historical Society who brought numerous photos and items from the pre-wilderness days.

The area was originally slated for logging in 1895 when lumberman A.D. Johnston bought 80 acres on Clark Lake; however, he was moved by the pristine old-growth and decided to preserve it instead. He and several wealthy friends from the iron and steel industry at that time formed the private Sylvania Club, buying large tracts of land which they protected for over 70 years. The word "sylvan" simply means "of the woods." Penn-

Sylvania was Penn's woods. A. D. Johnston and company called their area simply Sylvania. Many Sylvania Club members were considered "Carnegie Boys."

They built lodges, primarily on Clark Lake. A. D. Johnston's log building was called "Trossachs" from the poem "Lady of the Lake," by Sir Walter Scott, and the Trossachs Valley in central Scotland. Johnston's father had migrated from Dunblane Scotland in 1846. Dunblane sits at the border of the Trossachs Valley, a region of outstanding beauty in Scotland.

The first large club lodge was Wildwood. Other buildings were constructed nearby, all clustered on Clark Lake. Ownership changed hands a few times over the years as people passed on. By the 1940's, Sylvania was owned by Lawrence P. Fisher of "Body by Fisher" who built auto bodies for General Motors, and Clarence M. Christiansen, a lumberman from Phelps, WI. President Dwight Eisenhower was guided around Sylvania during a vacation trip in 1946. The press wrote, "The fish were so thick and fighting so fast, Ike had to stand behind a tree to bait his hook."

After Fisher and Christiansen passed on, Sylvania was sold in 1966 to the US Forest Service for \$5,740,000. Ladybird Johnson attended the dedication on Clark Lake and it was designated "Sylvania Recreation Area." Later, in 1987 Sylvania was designated a Wilderness Area, and the buildings on Clark Lake were removed. The current size of Sylvania is 18,327 acres.

In Watersmeet, Bob Zelinski has operated Sylvania Outfitters for over 40 years, providing services to the multitudes of visitors to Sylvania. Aside from a pavilion on Clark Lake and a motorized campground, Sylvania is open only to non-motorized recreational activities, such as paddlecraft trips, fishing, hiking, and backcountry camping. Sylvania boasts the largest tract of virgin forest in Michigan outside of the Porcupine Mountains State Park.

March 2026 — Photographer Nathan Miller presented his 2025 photo shoot of Ontonagon County, which was the latest iteration of the Rieger Project. Doctor Jon Rieger was a sociologist from the University of Louisville, Kentucky who started a photo documentation project in Ontonagon County starting in 1970. The project initially included about 100 photos of businesses in Ontonagon County and evolved to well over 600 photos today.

All photos are taken from the exact same location so that the perspective in the photos doesn't change. All businesses, municipalities, and more are photographed every five years, thereby documenting historical change through pictures.

Jon Rieger took the photographs himself for all iterations through 2015. Before he departed from this world, Doctor Rieger established an endowment with the Community Foundation of Louisville to perpetually fund our 5-year photo documentation project in Ontonagon County. Photographer Nathan Miller of Chassell (aka Nathan Invincible) took over photographer duties for the 2020 iteration.

Nathan Miller was already familiar with the vast majority of Ontonagon County because he is an avid adventurer who has explored all the old copper mine sites in the western UP. His latest venture is to paddle all the lakes in the Ottawa National Forest, toward which he has made good progress.

Nathan gave us an excellent presentation on his 2025 photo shoot. For this iteration, he added a number of business interior shots, such as the Hoop and Holler, which has the westernmost barstool in the Eastern Time Zone.

Nathan shared a few of his favorite interiors from 2025. Zach Halkola gave him a tour of the refinery and powerhouse at the White Pine Mine site. The refinery is the largest structure in Ontonagon County.

In Ewen, the folks at the McMillan Township Library showed him the pristine bank vault in their space

which is inside the old State Bank of Ewen Building. All the vault security mechanisms are still in working order, and gears are visible so that you can appreciate the intricacies of the machinery in historic bank vaults.

Another pleasant surprise in Ewen was a converted sawmill building at Ewen Building Supply. It's over a century old with an arched roof that once housed a major sawmill in Ewen. Now it provides storage space for building materials for sale.

As long as Nathan was in Ewen, Gary Fors gave him a tour of the old Ewen School, in which the gymnasium is still in excellent repair, but the rest of the century-old building is in distinct decline. Nathan will repeat all of these interior photos in 2030, documenting historical change.

Meanwhile, if you happen to be at an obscure lake deep in the Ottawa National Forest this summer and a friendly man shows up with a pack boat on his person, that will most likely be Nathan Invincible.

April 2026 — We watched two segments of a video about western UP foods, presented by a nationally-famous food documentarist, Andrew Zimmern. His show was called "Bizarre Foods."

First we learned details about the Peterson Fish Market in Hancock. The Peterson family has one of the few remaining commercial fishing licenses on Lake Superior, and owns a fish tug which plies the big lake. Because the Petersons have Native American blood, they are allowed to use gill nets, with which they catch Whitefish, Salmon, and Lake Trout. They sell fish from their market in Hancock.

The show included some footage of the fish tug operating on Lake Superior. It was a breezy day, so the boat was rocking pretty good. The Petersons said that when the wind gets too strong, they stay in port, though they did note that they've had their fish tug on its side on more than one occasion. Fortunately, fish tugs are very seaworthy boats, which roll

back upright (displacement hull).

Zimmern very happily ate the Petersons offerings in their little restaurant next door to their market on Quincy Hill. He also very much enjoyed their fish sausage, and he even ate a fish liver dish and claimed to like that, too.

Next, Zimmern took us inland, north of Hancock to the Mark and Riikka Hepokoski farm near Boston Location. Mark is a local American Finn who found his bride in Finland. They practice a lot of traditional Finnish food preparations on their farm. Zimmern sampled homemade Scandinavian egg coffee, Karelian pies (which have creamy innards wrapped in a rye crust), Juustoa (fresh cheese), Thimbleberry Jam, Fishhead Stew of course, Liver Dumplings, Fish Bread, Nisu, and Robber's Roast.

To make Robber's Roast, you bury a pork shoulder roast in a heated coffer underground. After six hours, you dig up the Robber's Roast and enjoy it as a main course.

Just to take in the culture, Zimmern took sauna with Mark Hepokoski and his son. They used cedar switches to whack their backs. The sauna was superheated above 200 degrees. Zimmern said it felt like the temperature he uses to make brisket. Later he said that he thinks Sauna is a Finnish word that means I love you and I hate you at the same time.

Zimmern asked Mark if it's true that there's only one bridge across the Portage. Hepokoski said, "If that bridge ever goes out, there's going to be 350 million stranded Americans," – stranded because they can't get to Copper Island (or Kuparisaaari).

May 2026 — Mark Worrall presented on historical railroads in Ontonagon County. In addition to common carrier rail lines, Ontonagon County saw its share of mining railroads and logging railroads. There were also a few temporary construction railroads, such as during road construction, but there is very little documentation on these.

For the Common Carriers, the Du-

luth, South Shore & Atlantic predecessor began operations in the UP in 1855, the same year of the first Soo Lock. Eventually, rails ran from Sault Ste Marie through Bruce Crossing to Duluth. The station in Bruce Crossing was built in 1916. The early DSS&A was absorbed by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1888, but operated as a subsidiary named DSS&A until 1960, when passenger service was terminated. After that it was called the Soo Line Railroad (a freight railroad) until the line was essentially abandoned in 1980, though rail removal occurred in 1989-1990.

In the North End, the first of the common carriers was the Ontonagon and Brule River Railroad which started in 1882 and ran from Ontonagon to Rockland. In 1890 it was sold to the Milwaukee & Northern which became the Milwaukee Road which connected Channing to Mass City to Ontonagon.

The Copper Range Railroad started in 1899 and ran from Gay to McKeever near Mass City where it joined the Milwaukee Road. Operations ceased in 1972.

The Mineral Range Railroad started in 1901 and ran from a stamp mill on Keweenaw Bay to the mines of Mass City and Rockland (Michigan Mine), connecting to the Milwaukee Road at Riddle Junction (between Mass City and the Rockland Y on US-45). Operations ceased in 1923 due to an unsafe trestle over the West Branch of the Firesteel River.

Perhaps the most interesting of the common carriers was the Choate Branch of the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad. It operated from 1887 to 1941, though its heyday was the late 1800's when it served pine logging operations through what are now mostly ghost towns – Croziers Mills near Watersmeet (Gogebic County), Interior, Barclay, Paulding, Craigmere, Robbins (spur from Craigmere), and Choate in far southern Ontonagon County. There was hope that the line would extend 12 miles or so to Ewen, but that never happened. Both Choate and Interior once had

populations over 1,000. The mill in Choate shut down in 1902, and the machinery was moved to Ontonagon by John Hawley and D. J. Norton. Most of the pine logged in the late 1800's was purchased from Diamond Match Company, who was by far the biggest forest landholder in Ontonagon County in the pine heydays.

Following the decimation of the pines, two hardwood operations thrived on the Choate Branch – Calderwood and Bonifas. Calderwood was east of Bond Falls and enjoyed operations for a couple decades. In 1939 and 1940 the Copper District Power Company built a dam on the Middle Branch of the Ontonagon River and filled their Bond Lake Reservoir, flooding most of Calderwood.

Bonifas was north of Bass Lake outside of Watersmeet, operating from 1909 to 1928. It was the last of the operations on the Choate Branch. The town was named after William Bonifas, a famous lumberman from the Escanaba area who supplied wood to Kimberly Clark in Neenah, WI. In 1934 the Bonifas townsite became a CCC Camp. The last little bit of the Choate Branch ceased operations in 1941.

Regarding Mining Railroads, a famous one was a quarter mile or so long at the Belt Mine (later Lake Mine), connecting the mine to the stamp mill on the West Branch of the Firesteel River. This railroad ran only in 1883 and 1884, and it was one of very few narrow-gauge railroads in Ontonagon County. Moving a steam locomotive to the mine site from Ontonagon was a herculean task. Following cessation of operations in late 1884, the locomotive sat idle until 1906 when it was purchased by the Victoria Mine. Since Victoria had an enormous supply of compressed air from the Taylor Hydraulic Air Compressor, the locomotive was converted from a steam engine to a compressed air engine.

The vast majority of logging railroads used standard-gauge rails, though the weight of the rails was less than the commercial carrier rails. One

of the big users of logging rails in the south end of Ontonagon County was Holt Logging Company, who purchased pinelands from Diamond Match Company in the Baltimore River area north of Bruce Crossing. Holt logged here in the early 1900's. Like most railroad logging operations, Shay steam locomotives were used.

In northern Ontonagon County, Greenwood Lumber Company used logging railroads from Ontonagon to the Silver City area during the same time period that Holt (from Oconto, WI) was cutting in the Baltimore country.

Following Greenwood, the Northern Logging Company started railroad logging northeast of Ontonagon in 1925. The company later became Lake Superior Lumber Company, and later yet the Gorman Lumber Company, ceasing logging operations in 1948. These three companies no doubt had the most mileage of logging railroads of any in Ontonagon County.

Meanwhile, from 1918 to 1930, Porterfield & Ellis ran their logging railroad line out of Pori, which included a famous river loop across the East Branch of the Ontonagon River, where the rails dropped into and climbed out of a 200-foot deep valley with grades over 17 percent. Their Baldwin locomotive ran 80 mph downhill in order to make the climb up the other side.

As for modern rails in Ontonagon County, the Escanaba and Lake Superior Railroad bought out the old Milwaukee Road and used to serve the pulp mill in Ontonagon until the early 2000's. The rails were pulled from Ontonagon to Rockland and the grade is now a recreation trail. Some local E&LS Rails still exist, unused from the Rockland Y to the Sidnaw area, and it appears that this section will become a recreation trail, too. At this moment in time, nobody is predicting return of rail service to Ontonagon County unless the old DSS&A line is revived from Bergland to the White Pine Mine area.

Editor's Note: The following article was submitted by Lucy Granroth:



A SCHOOL PHOTO FROM VICTORIA

A few months ago, I was contacted by a woman named Cyndi Clare who had spent years trying to identify an old school photograph from her family collection. The image showed a group of children seated on the steps of a rural schoolhouse somewhere in the Copper Country or western Upper Peninsula. In the front row sat her grandfather, Frederick Bernard Voelker, born in 1904. Beyond that, much of the photograph remained a mystery.

Like many family photos passed down through generations, the image had no label. No date, no school name, and no certainty about who else might be pictured. Cyndi knew her grandfather had attended school in the Quincy area as a child before the family moved to Victoria in Ontonagon County around 1914. The photograph could have been taken at a school near either place.

One of the things I enjoy most about genealogy and local history research is that even small details can help solve a mystery. In this case, the key turned out to be the building itself. After comparing the photograph to dozens of historic images of area schools, I began to suspect the children were seated outside the Victoria school. The windows, siding, and doorway all appeared to match. Cyndi even counted the number of clapboards beneath the windows in both photographs and found they lined up almost perfectly. The only major difference was the placement of the door, leading us to believe the school photo may have been taken near a side or rear entrance rather than the front of the building.

Cyndi later spoke with Rich Ernest of the

Ontonagon County Chamber of Commerce, who agreed that the photograph was very likely taken at the Victoria school. Along with the photograph, Cyndi also shared some of her family's history in the Copper Country and Ontonagon County.

Her great grandfather, Charles Voelker, immigrated from Oberkochen, Germany in 1883 and settled in the Hancock area. He worked briefly for the Scheuermann Brewing Company before becoming a miner with the Quincy Mining Company. By the 1890s, the family lived at #20 Limerick in Quincy Location, where Frederick was born in 1904. After moving to Victoria in 1914, several members of the family worked for the Victoria Copper Mining Company until the mine closed in 1921.

Today, the photograph remains meaningful not only because the school was likely identified, but because there are still unanswered questions. Cyndi believes some of Fred Voelker's siblings may also be pictured among the students, though they have never been positively identified. She would love to hear from any descendants of the Voelker family who may recognize faces in the image or have additional information about the family's time in Victoria or the Keweenaw.

Projects like this are a reminder of how closely family history and local history are tied together. If you have any info for Cyndi, contact owner@copperthreadgenealogy.com and I'll be sure she gets it.

Lucy Granroth owns Copper Thread Genealogy & Research. She is a native of Hancock and attended Finlandia University. She conducts independent historical and genealogical research, creates family trees, and writes local history pieces focused on the Copper Country and western Upper Peninsula.



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

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