The County Historian

News from the Ontonagon County Historical Society

Dean Juntunen, Editor

Autumn 2026

OCHS
422 River St
Ontonagon,
MI 49953

email: ochs@jamadots.com
phone: 906-884-6165

NOTE: If you want an article published in the newsletter, send to Dean Juntunen, 11425 Aspen Lane, Mass City, MI 49948, or e-mail 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 23 to October 18, 2026.
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:

Basile, Sue
Berg, Karen
Berman, Sally
Bishop, David
Brickner, Sue
Brickner, Dan
Broemer, Marlene
Brownell, Bob
Brownell, Mary
Burke, Laura
Chabot, Bill
DesJardin, Kristin
Domitrovich, Tom
Doyle, John
Doyle, Larry
Doyle, Pat
Duff, Shannon
Dykstra, Shirley
Eckloff, Jean
Evans, Matt
Fourez, Jon
Graham, Linda
Guilbault Brothers
Hammer-Mueller, Robin
Johanson, Bruce
Juntunen, Arthur
Juntunen, Dean
Juntunen, Duane
Kallunki, Deb
Kane, Max
Koski, Jerry
Koski, Linda
Langlois, Ken
Malila, Fern
Menzemer, Dave Sr
Menzemer, Dave Jr
Menzemer, Jeana
Menzemer, Luke
Menzemer, Wendy
Morris, Darien
Ojaniemi, Kristin
Pattison, Judy
Perry, Lyle
Pharis, Robin
Ruutila, Bruce
Sells, Karen
Sells, Kate
Steiner, Brandi
Wardynski, Kathy
Wettberg, Heidi
Workman, Marie
Workman, Ralph

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





This year we had two new people working at the museum welcome desk, Heidi Wettberg and Marlene Broemer, L to R above. The ever-popular Linda Graham also staffed the desk. The three of them were an awesome team, dispensing information and sending children on museum Treasure Hunts.

BOARD NEWS

Incumbent board members Dean Juntunen, Jerry Koski, and Ken Langlois opted to run again. Incumbent John Doyle opted to retire after decades of service to the historical society. John's shoes will be just about impossible to fill, but Dan Brickner agreed to give it a try. Thus, Brickner, Juntunen, Koski, and Langlois were elected to 3-year seats.

Currently, your board members are Sally Berman, Dave Bishop, Dan Brickner, Bill Chabot, Jean Eckloff, Robin Hammer-Mueller, Dean Juntunen, Jerry Koski, Ken Langlois, Fern Malila, Jeana Menzemer, and Kristin Ojaniemi.

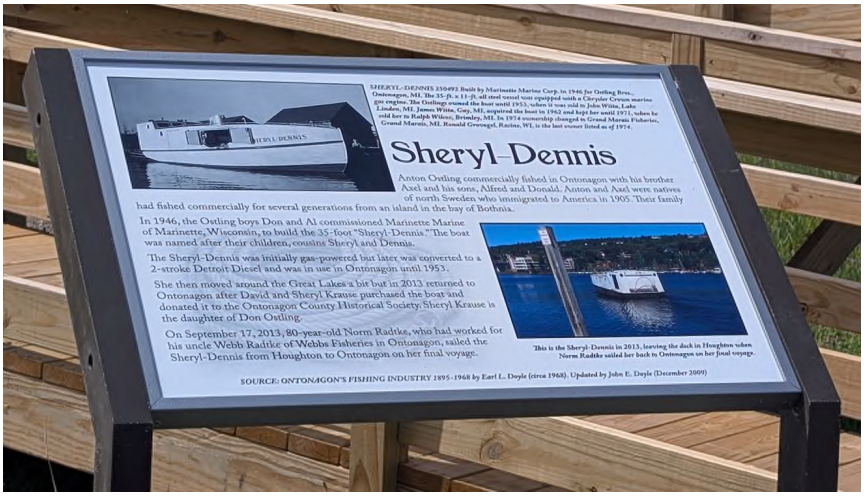
Board officers for 2026/2027 are President Dean Juntunen, Vice President Fern Malila, Secretary Sally Berman, and Treasurer Dave Bishop.

If you are interested in future board service, please contact Dean Juntunen.

GENEROUS DONATIONS

We fundraise every year through museum and lighthouse tour fees, membership dues, etc. However, our budget is not filled by these efforts. Our financial success is thanks to generous individual donors and organizations.

For example, we became a cooperating site with the Keweenaw National Historical Park about 20 years ago, and since that time their Advisory Commission has given us an annual grant. This year, the award was $13,600.



Above is one of the two interpretive signs we added to our lighthouse grounds in the spring of 2026. This one is for the Sheryl-Dennis fish tug, and the other is for the commercial fishing industry in Ontonagon.

Another organizational donor this year was **"Good Eats for Good Deeds."** All the food establishments in Ontonagon started this annual fundraiser in conjunction with Copperfest, where they sell food, and this year they donated the proceeds to the Ontonagon County Historical Society, presenting us with a check for more than $1,100.

Individual donors are too numerous to list here, but all donors do receive a Thank You letter from OCHS. Of special note this year is Mike Halron, who grew up in Ontonagon. Mike has added us to his personal Trust.

Anyone interested in donating to OCHS can easily do so through our website, ontonagonmuseum.org

VISITOR NUMBERS

For our tourism season of May 23-October 18 this year, compared to 2025 we saw a visitor increase of 1.5%. Total visitors for this period were 6,337.

Many visitors find us through our billboard at the M-64 corner in Silver City as they visit the Porkies. We purchased a new billboard this fall, printed via Peninsula Graphics in Ontonagon, who will store our new billboard until spring.

Also, a lot of visitors find the lighthouse thanks to our large banner on M-64 just west of the big bridge over the Ontonagon River. In winter we remove the banner.

Just for fun, Fern Malila combed through our visitor logs at the Lighthouse and found that 44 US States and the District of Columbia were represented this year (the six States that were NOT on the list were Delaware, Hawaii, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia). Plus, we had guests from 10 foreign countries! Bolivia, Canada, England, Germany, India, Latvia, Singapore, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, and far off China.

DNR BILL NICHOLLS HERITAGE TRAIL

Dan Spegel, a DNR Historian, is spearheading this heritage trail project, which will take a few years altogether. The Bill Nicholls Trail is the old Copper Range Railroad grade from Greenland to Houghton. OCHS agreed to be a cooperating partner on this.

LIGHTHOUSE NEWS



Visitors are commenting that our lighthouse is the best one they tour. When asked why, they say that it looks like a home inside. The furnishings definitely add ambience.

Also, we purchased a couple of picnic tables constructed of plastic composite material to resist weathering. They will be on the Lighthouse grounds next year, where we essentially have a lighthouse park. We also have a couple of doggie poop-bag stations.

Next year, we plan to have lights and displays inside the Sheryl-Dennis fish tug.

An interesting tidbit is that we had a formal proposal of marriage at our lighthouse in September. Our lighthouse has also hosted marriage ceremonies in the past. Also this summer, REA's Country Lines magazine included a nice article about our lighthouse.

Aside from that, the buildings on the lighthouse grounds are looking good, as Max Kane of Marenisco painted our lighthouse trim and the garage on a volunteer basis this fall.

Also, we have two "new" refurbished windows thanks to Karl Larson and Nick Clark. Both gentlemen work for the National Park in summer, but otherwise they rebuild historical windows. Karl is from the south end of Ontonagon County, having grown up in the Bruce Crossing area.

We will apply for grant funding to refurbish the remaining lighthouse windows in the near future.

Also, we have applied for a grant to place a steel cut-out sculpture of a lightkeeper at our Ontonagon lighthouse. Artist Kasey Koski creates these, and she has a few of them placed in the Copper Country.

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

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



PAST DINNER PROGRAMS

June 2026 -- Doug Karttunen presented the complete story of the journey of the Ontonagon Boulder to Washington, DC in 1843. The journey started on July 4th and ended on Nov 26th – four and a half months, 1800 miles, 146 days.

The boulder had been sitting on the riverbank under what is now Victoria reservoir, and it was well known, having been visited by Henry Schoolcraft and Douglass Houghton among others. Detroit businessman Julius Eldred had made a business transaction with Chief Kun de Kun of Ontonagon to purchase the boulder, and in 1843 Eldred with his hired team of men arrived at the site of the boulder to commence moving it to Detroit.

However, upon arriving at the boulder, they found a group of men from Wisconsin Territory already there, and those men were not willing to relinquish the boulder. None other than James K. Paul was with the group from Wisconsin.

So, Eldred had to promise additional money to the Wisconsinites. The good news is that they helped him with his moveable rail system to transport the boulder through the woods to a landing site on the Main Branch of the Ontonagon River. A swath was cut through the trees for the moveable rails. The boulder was loaded onto a railcar that had been assembled onsite on two 25-foot sections of rail. The rails were then leapfrogged from the back of the car to the front. Place front rails, move car forward, lift rear rails and place them in front, over and over again until they reached the river. Thence a Mackinaw boat carried the boulder down to



Schoolcraft's 1820 sketch of the Ontonagon Boulder. Both the boulder and the riverbanks are exaggerated in size in this sketch.

Ontonagon. This first leg took from July 4 to August 13.

The boulder sat in Ontonagon until September 12 because Eldred had to sail back to Detroit to get more cash to pay off the Wisconsinites. At this point, Eldred had paid $150 to Chief Kun-de-Kun, $1765 to James Hammond of Wisconsin Territory, and $370 to 16 men for labor in moving the boulder to Ontonagon.

The second leg of the journey took 5 days on the schooner Algonquin, 320 miles to Sault Ste Marie, sailing around the Keweenaw Peninsula. This cost Eldred another $100. Also, the US War Department was ordered to confiscate the boulder to bring it to Washington, DC. Eldred had no choice but to give up the boulder to the War Department, but he was allowed to bring it to Detroit first to display it for a few days.

The boulder was transported around the St Marys Rapids by Mackinaw boat through a canal and then on an oxen cart to the American Fur Company warehouse below the rapids. The boulder remained at the Sault for 17 days altogether. Then it rode on the schooner William Brewster, 350 miles to Detroit in seven days, October 4-11, and Eldred shelled out another $45 for this leg.

In Detroit, Eldred had 4 black stallions pull the boulder in a wagon as he paraded it around Detroit. The boulder was then displayed in the building which housed Detroit's leading newspaper, The Advertiser, where Eldred charged viewers 25 cents each.

On November 1, the War Department started the boulder's 4th leg of its journey, this time from Detroit to Buffalo, NY on the revenue cutter USS Erie, 240 miles in 8 days, arriving on November 9. A publication in Buffalo noted, "While in transit from the revenue cutter Erie to the railroad depot on Exchange Street, it was under the immediate charge of Capt. S. P. Heintzelman, United States quartermaster, on a four wheeled truck behind two spans of horses and a driver. The horses were gayly decorated." This transit took 2 days altogether. Julius Eldred was there, too, as he was allowed to accompany the boulder to Washington, DC.

The 5th leg of the boulder's journey, by rail, roughly paralleling the Erie Canal, took two days from Buffalo to Albany, NY, a distance of 300 miles, arriving on November 13.

The 6th leg of the journey was on the steamship Knickerbocker from Albany to New York City, 151 miles in one day. The boulder was shown around New York City for two days, including a stop at the Pearl Street Weigh Station, where the boulder officially weighed in at 3,702 pounds.

The 7th and final leg of the journey was from NYC down the east coast, then up Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River to Alexandria, VA on the schooner Alexandria, thence by dray to the yard of the War Department Building next to the White House – 410 miles in 9 days, arriving November 26, 1843.

Eldred petitioned Congress in January of 1844 to either reimburse him for the boulder or return it to him in Detroit. In April of 1844, Congress passed a joint resolution to either reimburse Eldred or give the Ontonagon Boulder back. In January of 1847, Eldred was awarded the sum of $5,664.98.

Julius Eldred died in 1854, never having gained any riches from his dalliance with the Ontonagon Boulder. The boulder is now housed in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History and can be viewed by appointment only.

July 2026 -- John Doyle presented the history of the Norwich Country Club, which started in 1957 as the Funnel Club, comprised of seven high school football players. The boys built a wooden bar in their high school shop class, and the bar's first use was at the Arvison farm on Norwich Road that year during the graduation party.

In 1958, the Norwich Country Club was officially formed, as was the Stein Club. The Domitrovich family donated land to both clubs providing that the clubs would harvest the

timber off the land with the proceeds to go to the Domitrovich family. Some of main founding members of the Norwich Country Club were John Doyle, George and Tony Domitrovich, Dan Chabot, Lyle Stenfors, Jim Bigge, Roger Menigoz, George Csmarich, and Joe Gerzetich. One of the main purposes of the club was to provide a safe haven for young adults to drink Bosch beer. Given the number of members, a lot of empties accumulated.

When Lyle Stenfors' father heard about this new Norwich Country Club, John Doyle said, "He told Lyle to go out to his property on the west side of the river where Sparkies Sawmill is and take all of the lumber from there and use it for your club house… Now things are starting to take shape!"

Someone else told them that there was an old building at the defunct Pori Sawmill near Rousseau (back of Mass City) that they could have for lumber. John Doyle said, "We took a pulp truck and hay wagon out there, dismantled the building, saved all the lumber, nails, etc. and brought it to the new Norwich Country Club site!"

John also rescued a discarded woodstove from the pulp mill, where he was working at that time. The mill shop repaired a broken leg on the stove and voila, the club had heat.

John Doyle said, "Tony and George cut cedar poles for the foundation support. Tony Domitrovich made a deal with the Vertash brothers to cut the spruce poles for the rafters. The two brothers lived up the Norwich Road a little way."

John Doyle said, "The Norwich Country Club needed money to purchase additional building supplies from Hawley Lumber Company, Gambles, and Chapmans. To raise money, we simply cashed in our stash of Bosch beer empties, which were 5 cents each."

The Stein Club also put up a building. The two clubs held family picnics, softball games, and kids foot races. They also shared parties where Hank Thompson and the two Stimac brothers would take turns telling jokes, playing accordions, and singing for the party! John Doyle said, "What a great time – and never an argument!"

Around 1962, the two clubs started a long-standing tradition of building competitive floats for the Labor Day Parades in Ontonagon. Untold hours went into the fabrication of these elaborate floats, as you can imagine from the attached photo of a steam locomotive.

And now in 2026, this competition continues, making every Labor Day Parade in Ontonagon a must-see event.



The Norwich Country Club built a train for the Labor Day Parade.

August 2026 -- Sally Berman created a slide show on the historical formation of the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park. In 1942, Aldo Leopold chimed in by writing The Last Stand, which was published in Outdoor America when the last stand of virgin northern hardwoods in the Porcupine Mountains was threatened by wartime cutting. The essay was accompanied by an editorial sidebar explaining pending legislation and urging readers to write to their congressmen.

Leopold wrote: "Sometime in 1943 or 1944 an axe will bite into the snowy sapwood of a giant maple. Then the giant will lean, groan and crash to the earth: the last tree of the last virgin hardwood forest of any size in the Lake States.

…When we abolish the last sample of the Great Uncut, we are, in a sense, burning books. I am convinced that most Americans of the new generation have no idea what a decent forest looks like. The only way to tell them is to show them. To preserve a remnant of decent forest for public education is surely a proper function of government.

I would like to see the Porcupine region acquired and preserved as an act of national contrition, as the visible reminder of an unsolved problem, as a token of things hoped for. To this end it had best be kept roadless, axeless, hotel-less, and open only to ski or foot travel. The mere existence of such a token-forest might hasten the day when the green robe again spreads over the Lake States, and when the cutting and using of mature timber becomes an act of normal land-cropping, rather than an act of land-pillage."

Raymond Dick, an Ironwood man who loved the wildness of the Porkies, had a cabin at the mouth of the Big Carp River. Dick was the key figure in getting the park established. He had help from two friends: Ed Johnson, editor of the Ironwood Daily Globe; and Ben East, member of the Michigan Conservation Hall of Fame and legendary outdoor writer for Outdoor Life.

Johnson and East persuaded Raymond Dick to write 1,000 letters to letters to individuals and conservation groups from coast to coast. The country-wide financial response was phenomenal. Dick was able to run with the project.

His next move was to take P.J. Hoffmaster, Director of Conservation, to the mouth of the Carp River to see the Porkies for himself. If had been Hoffmaster's belief that one of his department's foremost obligations was to provide the people of Michigan with an adequate system of outdoor playgrounds. The Porcupine Mountains fit into that idea in a special way, and Raymond Dick won a powerful ally. Then with the backing of the Conservation Commission, Hoffmaster sent Governor Harry Kelly a report recommending that 46,000 acres be purchased as a roadless park and forest museum, "In order that what happened to Michigan's pine may not also happen to the last of our hardwood."

Governor Kelly, a handicapped veteran of World War I, went only as far as the mouth of the Presque Isle River, but that was enough. "This has to be kept," he told Raymond Dick.

In 1944, the Governor called a special session of the legislature and asked for an appropriation of one million dollars to make the purchase. The bill passed. Development of the park started a couple years later, and of course the Porkies Ski Area was added to the edge of the wilderness.

Due to mining and logging, not all land in the park was virgin forest, but the boundary did preserve that last stand of uncut hardwood. Today, the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park is the biggest tourism draw in Ontonagon County.

OCHS benefits from the Porkies effect as many people who come for the Park also visit the museum and lighthouse.

Following Sally Berman's slides, we watched two short videos by Alexis Dahl, an enthusiastic young woman who creates Michigan videos on Youtube. Alexis told us about the geology of the Porcupine Mountains, whose story is volcanic. Then, still in the geology realm, she told us about the Watersmeet Gneiss, which currently holds the title as the oldest surface rock formation in the United States. The Watersmeet Gneiss can be seen in a shallow rock cut on Highway US-45 a couple miles north of Watersmeet.

September 2026 --

JR Richardson told us stories about his service as a member of the Natural Resources Commission for the Michigan DNR. When he was initially invited by then-Senator Mike Prusi to join the board, he said that he wouldn't be able to drive downstate for every meeting every month. No problem. MDOT said that he could catch a ride on their plane when available, and so his service began.

Commission members are appointed by the Governor, and JR was first appointed by Governor Granholm. He continued to serve through Snyder's governorship, and into Whitmer's.

JR found his first Senate Confirmation Hearing to be interesting. Being from the UP, he was mostly unknown downstate, so the Senators were asking all kinds of questions so that they could get to know him better. JR related that one Senator said, "So as a commissioner, you will have to increase hunting and fishing license fees from time to time. Are you going to be okay with telling your friends that you have to raise their license fees?"

JR couldn't help himself, replying in his usual witty manner, "Three quarters of them don't have licenses anyway, so it ain't going to make much difference."

The Senators laughed, and continued the hearing. Another Senator asked, "Are you a fisherman, JR?"

JR replied, "I've basically fished all my life."

The Senator continued, "Did you ever catch your limit of brook trout by yourself in one day?"

JR smiled and once again couldn't resist a cheeky response, "I have," then he pointed around the room,

saying, "and your limit, and your limit, and your limit…"

JR thought he might have just shot himself in the foot, but apparently the Senators didn't mind cheekiness because JR Richardson was installed as a new Natural Resources Commissioner. He thought they needed a breath of UP air, and some real outdoor representation.

After four years, he had to be re-appointed, but for that, he said, "The Senate basically gave me a pass-through confirmation. I asked why, and a Senator told me, 'You know, most people are very nervous during confirmation hearings, but you seem to enjoy them too much. We didn't need you to tweak us again.'"

JR noted that during his time as Commissioner, many people tried to get him to join their political position – take sides -- but he preferred to keep politics out of it and just make sensible decisions. He figures that's why he served three governors – A Democrat, a Republican, and another Democrat.

With years of experience on the Natural Resources Commission, JR eventually became the Chairman. To their knowledge, he is the only person from the UP to serve as Chairman of the Natural Resources Commission (at least in the last 70 years). He once requested that the Commission hold a meeting in the Ontonagon Theater. That remains the only Natural Resources Commission meeting held in Ontonagon.

JR closed by saying that he was honored to speak to the hard-working volunteers of the Ontonagon County Historical Society.

October 2026 -- Lucy Granroth presented helpful hints for genealogical preservation. Regarding family photos, she recommends not labeling the back as something like, "Grandma and Mary," which may be meaningless to subsequent generations, but to use something like, "Anna Maki Koskela and her sister Mary Maki Johnson, about 1945, Calumet." Basically, include as much information as you please, but at a minimum include full names including maiden names, your best guess for the year of the photo, and location if known. If you create digital storage of your family photos, be sure to include storage of the information pertaining to the photos as well.

If you have a group photo in front of a building, include as much information as you have about the building itself.

Lucy recommends that you add a family information paper to your file cabinet with your other important papers. At a minimum, include Parents full names, Grandparents full names, Birthplaces, Education, Military Service, Life Experiences, Employment, Important family locations, Where family photographs and papers are kept, and Who should receive the family history materials. It's sort of a genealogical will.

If you're planning to research your family history online, consider trying Michiganology, which is a database of death certificates, naturalization records, and more (michiganology.org). Or, try FindAGrave, which includes grave locations, photos, and obits of the deceased (findagrave.com).

You can browse local history sites, such as CMEC Database, which is a Copper Miners Employee Card database listing employees of Calumet & Hecla (miners.mtu.edu). Copper Country Historical Images (cchi.mtu.edu). Or Keweenaw Time Traveler, which will tell you what you would be seeing in history based on your phone's current GPS location (keweenawhistory.com). copperrange.org has a lot of history, information, and photos about the Copper Range Railroad. UPLINK has tons of online historical archive-type material (uplink.nmu.edu). Houghton.migenweb.org has a lot of local genealogy and history pages. If you're into bottles, try Copper Country Bottles which features all the local businesses that used bottles (coppercountrybottles.com).

And of course local Archives include Michigan Tech Archives, Keweenaw National Historical Park, Finnish American Heritage Center Archives, Houghton County Historical Society in Lake Linden, and the Ontonagon County Historical Society in Ontonagon.

Lucy complimented OCHS on the job that we're doing in general, preserving local history, and she was honored to give us a presentation.

Ontonagon County Historical Society
422 River St
Ontonagon, MI 49953

Ontonagon County Historical Society

Museum and Lighthouse Tours Available
Memorial Day Weekend through
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.