

A HISTORY PROJECT

JOURNEY BACK IN TIME



Carnegie Library celebrates 120 years

By MEGAN HUGHES
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IRONWOOD — The Ironwood Carnegie Library opened its doors in 1902, and has served the community ever since, seeing a number of librarians and directors, and countless thousands of patrons come through its doors.

Library Director Lynne Wiercinski spoke with the Daily Globe about the library's history earlier this month.

Over 120 years, the library has gone through some changes, much of it in technology, but the mission remains the same, said Wiercinski.

Today, the library offers both physical items as well as virtual materials for check-out.

"We have approximately 32,000 circulating items, including books, magazines, newspapers, DVDS, etc. housed within the library. Non-physical items include downloadable ebooks, magazines and videos," she said, which is a substantial amount compared to the approximate 5,000 that the library initially owned upon opening.

Andrew Carnegie

The Ironwood Carnegie Library is one of many libraries constructed by and named after Andrew Carnegie, a philanthropist from the late 1800s who, after making millions, donated funds to pursuits such as the purchasing of church organs, the construction of libraries, forming the Carnegie Hero Fund, the construction of the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and the world-

famous Carnegie Hall in New York City.

According to Wiercinski, Carnegie liked to fund projects in areas that he had some personal or business connection with, and Ironwood was no exception to this.

Wiercinski cited a commemorative publication produced in 1976 by the library's Diamond Jubilee Committee to mark the library's 75th anniversary. The committee included librarian Nell Canfield, as well as Dale W. Hoffschneider, Dorothy Voyce, Malvina Fieldseth and Hildur Roche, as well as Dora Manthey and Elizabeth Ekstrom, who passed before the book made it to print.

The 48-page book includes recollections of library employees, historic photos and other historical facts about the facility. According to this publication, Carnegie's connection to the area came from business dealings in the iron industry.

In the early 1800s, H.W. Oliver began obtaining ownership of land in the Minnesota ore fields, later expanding to the Gogebic Range. To do so, Oliver purchased the Metropolitan Company, which consisted of the Norrie, East Norrie, North Norrie and Pabst mines.

Wiercinski explained that Carnegie, needing more iron to make steel, purchased interest in the companies owned by Oliver in 1892.

"When Carnegie Steel Company absorbed those mines, he never had to buy iron ore again. He owned it. So his steel industry — there it was — we helped create it. He also invested in railroads and freighters, he was a savvy businessman," said Wiercinski. "In 1901, he sold it to J.P. Morgan for \$492 million. It made him one of the richest men in the world, and



Submitted drawing

THIS DRAWING is on the cover of a booklet put out by the Ironwood Carnegie Library in 1976 celebrating the library's 75th anniversary. Construction on the library began in 1901 after a grant was secured from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who made his money in steel and owned significant interest in the local iron mines. The new library opened in 1902. It was previously housed in the city hall, which once stood on McLeod Avenue.

that's when he started his philanthropic activities."

Wiercinski read a portion of a letter aloud that was printed in the publication. The letter was written by James Gayley, a vice president of Carnegie Steel Company. It reads, in part:

"... During one of your recent trips to Pittsburgh, I took up with you the question of having some modest libraries established at the towns representing our principal mining operations in the Lake Superior Regions.

I have just received a letter from our Superintendent at Ironwood, Michigan, who has charge of the Norrie group of mines and also the Tilden mines. They have in the town 5,000 volumes but have never had any suitable

building and they write to ask if you would contribute \$12,000 to erect a building to meet their requirements. The town itself agrees to maintain the library at their own expense.

Will you please advise what are your views in regard thereto.

Yours very truly,
James Gayley."

In response to this request, Carnegie wrote the following on the bottom of the letter:

"What amount for year would the town vote to maintain library in Ironwood? (signed in initials) AC"

The town made a decision, and in a letter dated April 17, 1900, Gayley wrote back to Carnegie that:

"The town pledges itself to raise annually \$2,000 for the support of the library."

The amount met the expectations of Carnegie, as in his following letter, he agreed to send the requested funds, should the town maintain the agreement. This letter is dated April 21, 1900.

"Dear Mr. Gayley, If Ironwood will pledge itself through its Councils to pay \$2,000 a year for maintenance of the library, and provide a suitable site, I shall give them the \$12,000, which they state is required to erect a library building.

Very truly yours,
Andrew Carnegie"

Wiercinski explained that the initial estimate of \$12,000 was later raised to \$17,000, as the architectural company said it needed more funds for the project to meet their needs. Carnegie agreed to send the additional \$5,000.

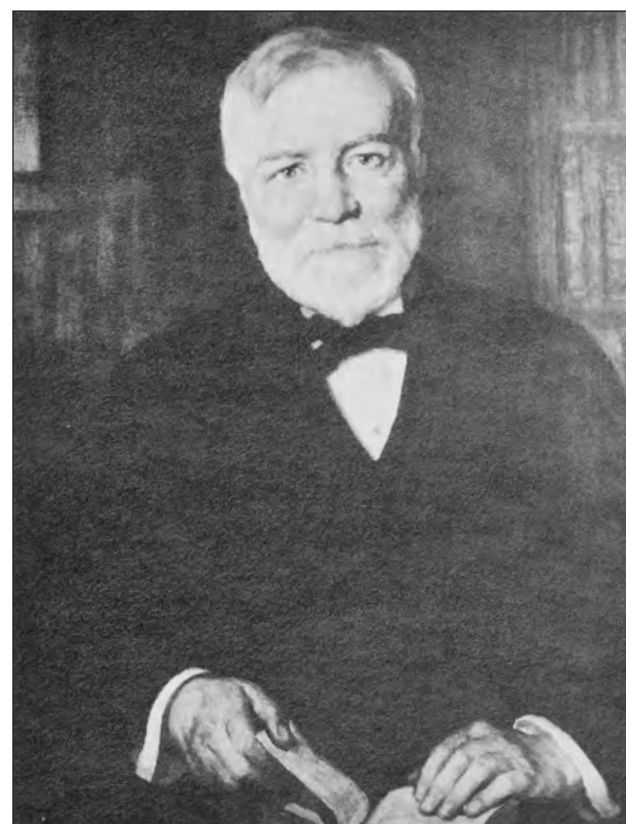
Adjusting for inflation \$12,000 in 1900 equates to roughly \$400,000 today.

"It was interesting, really," said Wiercinski as she broke down her interpretation of the letter exchange. "It reveals that Carnegie wanted to help across the country, and in areas that he had vested interest. He wanted to make sure he was building libraries in areas that didn't have libraries or had inadequate structures."

She explained that some places were denied the funds because of wanting to invest it in more than libraries.

"There were a lot that asked for money that wanted to combine the libraries with a church or with some kind of a community area ... and absolutely not, he wanted the money to be just for libraries," she said.

Construction of the library was overseen by the Carnegie Library Building Committee, whose members were appointed by the mayor and city council.



Submitted photo

This portrait of Andrew Carnegie, 1835-1919, was given to the Ironwood Carnegie Library by the Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1935.

Members of this committee included: John H. McLean, an individual heavily involved in Lake Superior mining operations and acted as general manager of the Oliver Iron Mining Company in Duluth in 1909; James S. Monroe, an attorney and legal advisor for the board of education from 1885 to 1928; Dr. H. E. Fox, a local dentist; John A. Hoskins and J. O. Hays.

The site where the library stands to this day had already been purchased, and construction began in 1901.

In 1902, the building was dedicated to the city of Ironwood. The cost was \$13,800.

Library history

The library has stood for 120 years, and from the beginning played an important role in its community, but Ironwood had a library for several years before it was constructed.

Wiercinski explained that before they had their own space, the library was housed in the old city hall. "It was located where Gogebic County Transit is now," she said.

According to the 1976 publication, the library was housed in the second floor of that city hall on McLeod Avenue in 1891, and was organized by a committee of individuals that dedicated their time to the growth of the library, referred to as the Library Organization Committee.

This committee included members: Luther L. Wright, a superintendent in the Ironwood school system that oversaw the construction of several schools, and served on the

book selection committee and board of trustees for the Ironwood library; Dr. John A. McLeod, a local surgeon and physician that operated a general practice as well as being a surgeon for the Metropolitan Iron and Land Company, among many other exploits; Edward Bailey, a bookkeeper; Capt. George Brewer, oversaw the opening of the Aurora mine and operated as mine inspector for Gogebic County, he later served on the library board of trustees; George F. Kelly, a local businessman operating in real estate; and Major M. W. Burt, superintendent of the Mt. Hope Mine, he later was appointed to the book selection committee for the library.

Upon its opening, this library was overseen by Rev. John Evans, who acted as librarian and as city clerk upon creation of that post. He was later was elected city treasurer in 1894.

In 1891, library cards were available for purchase for \$2, and would allow Ironwood residents to draw books from the library, a rule which was implemented by the organization committee. At this time, the library operated through funds collected from penal fines and court costs, which were granted to the use of the library by Mayor William Tribilcock.

Words of wisdom

As time has passed, people have come and gone through the doors of the library, leaving behind parts of themselves, and taking pieces with them. As

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Former Iron County Courthouse stands strong through 129 years of history

By KRISTIN KOLESAR
Iron County Historical Society

HURLEY – Step back in time and imagine walking on the streets of Hurley in 1892. Just a few years before, Iron County was a vast wilderness. Now the area is booming. New residents arrive every day. Some come from other parts of the Midwest or the East. Others are recent immigrants who have arrived from Europe. These new townspeople are eager to begin working as miners, lumberjacks, shopkeepers, or professionals in this pioneer community. As you walk on the street, you may overhear conversations in English, Italian, Finnish, Bohemian, German, Yiddish, Swedish, Polish, or Irish. People visit Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish houses of worship. Some residents dress in modern American fashion, while others wear clothing from “the old country.” This was life in Iron County when the current Iron

County Museum building was constructed as “a magnificent town hall for the town of Vaughn” (which would later become the city of Hurley).

In the early 1890’s, it was believed that an impressive town hall would draw even more people to the community. Architect L.H. Ruggles was hired to design the building in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The town had budgeted \$20,000 for the project, but it came in over budget at a final cost of \$27,303, which is equivalent to \$853,000 today. The contractors were Rinkle & Carroll. At the time, the area was a part of Ashland County. In 1893, Iron County was formed. The county needed a courthouse, and the Town of Vaughn sold the town hall to Iron County for the price of \$32,000.

The fire department was headquartered inside the Iron County Courthouse. The building had two large

front doors that would swing open to allow the hook and ladder fire wagon to exit onto the attached ramp. However, the fire department did not have its own team of horses. A fire bell was rung whenever the wagon was needed. Nearby residents would rush to the courthouse with their horses in hopes of arriving first and having the honor of pulling the wagon. According to newspaper articles from the past, sometimes there was a tie, and the men would get into fist fights while the fire raged.

Arguably, the most recognizable exterior feature is the clock tower. However, it almost wasn’t included in the original plan. Construction happened during the Panic of 1893, and many of the residents considered this feature to be “too grand” for a town hall, especially during a financial depression. The town board members insisted that the clock tower be included, and J.J. Neuhavre, a Chicago jeweler, came to install the clock. The clock worked well until there was a torrential rainstorm in June of 1922. Lightning struck the clock tower and set it ablaze. The original clock was destroyed, and for a second time, there was a debate over whether a replacement was needed. Once again, the county board voted to replace the clock. A Seth Thomas electric clock was selected at a cost of \$1,348, which is equivalent to \$22,500 today. Electricity was added to the tower to accommodate the clock. The wooden clock faces are five feet, two inches in diameter, originally with gold numerals painted on a black background. Museum visitors can see the century-old Seth Thomas clock works and three clock faces in the tower.

There was an extensive building remodel done in 1915. Prior to this renovation, the main floor was primarily one large open space. This area hosted dances, concerts, high school plays, graduations, and both boys’ and girls’ basketball games. Boys could not watch the girls play in bloomers, blouses, and long black stockings, so they stood outside and cheered during the games. During the renovation, the space was partitioned into offices and vaults. The \$8,852 total included furniture, fixtures, a heating plant overhaul, and work in the basement.

A favorite stop of museum visitors is the historic courtroom, complete with the judge’s bench, jury box, and a 48-star American flag. The courtroom has seen its share of scandalous trials, but its most notorious one happened in 1925. On May 2, 1924, Andrew Sigler, owner of the Gogebic Hotel, was murdered. Andrew was abusive to his family and an unfaithful husband to



Submitted photo

THE IRON County Historical Society provided this undated photo of the former Iron County courthouse. The building is now home of the Iron County Historical Society and Museum.

his wife, Emma. The police charged Emma as an accessory to his murder. It was very unusual for a woman to be accused of being involved in a murder. The jury deliberated for 27 hours before finally declaring Emma to be guilty. She was given a life sentence and was only the second woman in Wisconsin history to be given this punishment. The trial was covered extensively throughout the state and region with headlines such as “110 Pound Mother of Four Convicted of Murder.”

County officials worked in the building for a total of 83 years before moving into the newly constructed courthouse in 1975. The Iron County Historical Society was formed in 1967, and its initial museum consisted of one display case in the Montreal City Hall. In 1971, the museum moved to the Upson Town Hall. Looking for a more expansive building closer to town, the Iron County Historical Society purchased the former Iron County Courthouse building for \$1 in 1976. The museum opened in its new location in July of 1977.

For the first two years, exhibits were housed in three rooms on the main floor. Within several years, its collection expanded to include displays on all three floors, as well as having volunteers cutting, sewing, and weaving fabric to make rag rugs in the weaving room. The sale of these beautiful rugs helps to fund the costs of operating the museum.

Since its acquisition by the Iron County Historical Society, the building has undergone extensive repairs. Maintaining a structure that is 129 years old is an ongoing process. Recent repairs have included work on the clock tower, west tower, turrets, and furnace. The museum received a major facelift in the fall of 2021. A new roof was installed to replace the

roof that was previously put on in 1986. Steel shingles with a lifespan of 75 years were used. Louvers were placed in the clock tower to make it weather and bird tight. Double hung windows were installed in the courtroom to replace windows that were 35 years old.

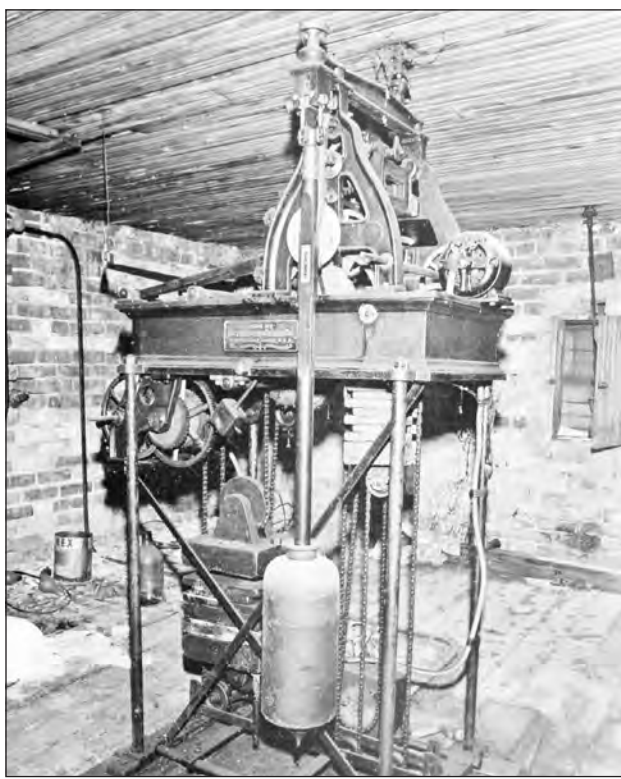
The Iron County Courthouse building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. It

was considered “architecturally significant in an area where there are few comparable buildings.” Since its construction in 1893, it has remained standing through seven wars, women gaining the right to vote, the Great Depression, and two global pandemics. The Iron County Historical Society is proud to preserve this architectural treasure for future generations.



Submitted photo

ALVIN LARSON restores the works of the tower clock in the former Iron County Courthouse in Hurley in October 1980. The photo was provided by the Iron County Historical Society.



Submitted photo

THE GEARS of the clock in the Iron County Museum tower, formerly the Iron County Courthouse, are seen in a photo provided by the Iron County Historical Society. The photo dates to the late 1970s-early 1980s, according to the ICHS.

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UNIDENTIFIED MEN stand next to a train in the former Watersmeet Station, which saw activity from the late 19th Century to the late 20th Century. The undated photo from Frank Kucevar is from historical archives.

Watersmeet Station: The rise and fall of a major U.P. depot

By P.J. GLISSON
news@yourdailyglobe.com
WATERSMEET — In 1840, the entire state of Michigan had only 104 miles of railroad, but 70

years later, in 1910, those miles had increased to 9,021. “Michigan’s Railroad History: 1825-2014,” available online, provides a

detailed timeline of the progress, and as of 2022, the Michigan Department of Transportation reports about 3,600 total, current railroad miles.



Submitted photo

THIS UNDATED photo shows a former depot for the long-defunct train station in Watersmeet. The first depot was established in 1883, and the last train left in 1984. Frank Kucevar provided the photo from historical archives.

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The effect of that transportation on the history of this region cannot be overstated, and several local residents took time this month to share with the Daily Globe their memories of the rise and demise of the local railroad system, particularly in relation to Watersmeet.

There is no sign of it now, but — in the words of Watersmeet Township Supervisor Mike Rogers — “Watersmeet used to be a train hub.”

Rogers and other residents there recall the train depot that once existed in the vicinity of George R. Peterson Jr. Township Park, on the corner of U.S. 45 and 1st Street, next to the Watersmeet Township Hall.

“They called it Watersmeet Station,” said Bob Zelinski, president of the Watersmeet Chamber of Commerce. “It’s fascinating. You won’t believe the traffic. It was jam-packed.”

Zelinski said the first railroad lines and depot were established in 1883, and the first shipment of iron ore hit the rails in 1884. He added that, in 1984, all freight rail service ended, with passenger service having closed already in prior years.

“So, it was here basically 100 years,” he said of train traffic.

Zelinski said the Watersmeet Depot was not as large or fancy as the still-existing Historic Ironwood Depot. Nevertheless, said Rogers, “Back in the day, it was something.”

“I remember when the trains came into the depot,” said Watersmeet resident Kathleen Kucevar. “It seems to me there were dark black benches.”

She said that members of her family were able to ride the trains free because her grandfather, Bill Kelly, was a railroad conductor.

As a result, Kucevar said she and her family regularly went to Kansas to visit her mom’s family there, and “my grandmother went to Chicago to see her sister.”

Frank Kucevar, Kathleen’s husband, also remembers the excitement of train travel, especially in relation to urban destinations such as Milwaukee and Chicago.

“It was a big deal for people who lived around here,” he said.

Kucevar said the first time he visited a big city was when he traveled to Milwaukee by train in his sophomore year of high school.

“When I was in school there in Watersmeet, I took it a couple times to Chicago,” he said. “It was a 12-hour ride.”

Regarding the then-existing depot, Kucevar said, “I remember it had a lot of big carts that they dropped the mail on. Anything they had in bulk would go on those carts.”

He recalls a lot of lumber and iron ore moving on the trains.

Rogers said that trains could be repaired indoors, thanks to a “roundhouse” structure. “If they had to work on engines or cars, they could pull them into this building,” he said.

“They had a big swivel platform,” said Frank Kucevar of the roundhouse design. “It could turn the trains 180 degrees, so they used that quite a bit.”

According to Zelinski, there were two railroad systems, each with their own coal sheds and roundhouses, larger than any on the Gogebic Range.

They were the Milwaukee Lake Shore & Western Railway Company and the Chicago and Northwestern Transportation Company.

According to historical reports, everything seemed to happen at once. In 1884, when MLS & W first set up its railroad between Ironwood and Watersmeet, both of those communities were established in the same year.

Moreover, the timeline from “Michigan’s Railroad History” shows that in 1887, the Gogebic & Montreal River Railroad (“Soo Line”) also was built into Gogebic County, and the Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic Railway was creat-

ed. The timeline also shows that, in the same year, 89 logging railroads operated in Michigan, and the state’s only international bridge opened across St. Mary’s River at Sault Ste. Marie “to create a direct route from the Upper Midwest to Atlantic Coast ports.”

And just as Watersmeet is known as “where the waters meet,” due to the confluence of the Ontonagon, Wisconsin and Paint rivers, the location also once had a “wye,” defined by Michiganrailroads.com as “a triangular joining of three rail lines with a railroad switch at each corner connecting to each incoming line.”

Zelinski said that, at Watersmeet’s peak, nearly three dozen trains pulled in and out of that locale every 24 hours.

All of this activity had a massive impact on the local economy. “When they put the railroad line from Watersmeet to Ironwood, there were all these mining locations popping up,” said Zelinski.

“In the heyday, a significant number of people in Watersmeet worked for the railroad,” said Zelinski.

In addition, he said, persons of wealth “had these big lodges all over the place,” so there also were many jobs as caretakers. For instance, he noted that MLS & W built a “gigantic resort” on the south side of Lake Gogebic.

At one point, Zelinski said Watersmeet had several hotels and saloons, plus 24-hour dining and fine entertainment.

“There were stables downstairs and an opera house upstairs,” he said of one venue.

Zelinski said that, in 1890, the Ontonagon Herald published an article titled “Have You Ever Been to Watersmeet?”

The article encouraged residents of Ontonagon to make the trip of 40-plus miles to Watersmeet, which at that time employed hundreds of men in lumber mill work.

“All the big names coming to Gogebic County came through Watersmeet,” assured Zelinski, referring to VIPs such as George Wakefield, for whom the city of Wakefield was named.

Ironically, history.com notes that the automobile also was being “invented and perfected in Germany and France in the late

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Wakefield Historical Society receives major gift

By P.J. GLISSON

news@yourdailyglobe.com

WAKEFIELD — Dennis Ferson claims that, for the past couple of decades, the Wakefield Historical Society has run its main street museum on about \$5,000 a year.

As the society's treasurer, Ferson said community support has been "amazing," and Bella Schroeder, the vice president, said society officers have been proactive about requesting help as needed.

So, after perfecting the art of managing on modest means, members were shocked when — for the past two years in a row — they received a total of nearly \$1 million from a single benefactor.

The estate of Richard W. Nyman, a former Wakefield resident, gifted the society \$120,000 in 2021, followed by a recent second allotment of \$800,000, for a total of \$920,000.

"We were so excited to receive \$120,000," said Donna Ferson, the society's secretary, "and then he gives us \$800,000."

Although her husband, Dennis, took responsibility for putting the latest funds into a trust, Donna said they hired professional help in relation to legal and financial management. They've also been having at least weekly meetings since the end of last year.

"I still can't believe it sometimes," said Bella.

Her husband, Harold Schroeder, is the society president and emphasized that the funds will be used in accordance with society bylaws, as well as related state rulings.

"Our primary purpose is to preserve the Wakefield Historical Society," said Harold, who assured that their intention is not to "hoard" the windfall, but rather "to use it responsibly for the future of the museum and Historical Society, as well as the greater Wakefield area."

He added, "This will take time and creative input from the greater community."

The four officers spoke to the Daily Globe in a Feb. 25 interview in the office of the new Wakefield city garage complex, off of U.S. 2. Society members are

renting the space because their museum, at 306 Sunday Lake St., does not have a working furnace.

As they spoke, a whiteboard next to them included a long list of their priorities for the museum. Items on the list include upgrading the electrical system, improving phone and internet capacity, addressing building security, and undergoing a property survey.

Installing an HVAC system is also a priority. "We have artifacts, paper, etc. that need climate control," said Donna. She added that such a project would be "a big expense," but noted, "I think it's a necessary thing."

Bella said that converting their Fiche documents into digital records also makes sense. "Fiche is not going to last forever," she said, adding of the digital goals, "That, to me, is very important."

Harold pointed out that the museum has a lot of raw data, in general, that needs organizing. He commended Donna for her ongoing time in cataloging, which he described as "a pretty intense job."

Bella said she'd also like to see some explanatory plaques installed at various local historical sites. "A lot of stuff happened in Wakefield," she said.

Donna reminded that the society already used some of Nyman's first donation — which is also in its own separate trust — on foundation repairs for the museum, which is 135 years old.

"The initial money we received saved the museum from collapsing," said Harold.

Regarding the remaining wish list, Dennis said, "A lot of these things will be covered by the original trust."

The officers remembered their benefactor, Richard Nyman, as someone with a heart for Wakefield. "He kept coming back to his hometown," said Donna.

"He lived in Alaska almost all his life," said Dennis, who explained that Nyman and his wife, Janice (nee Blanchard), often visited here to see family.



P.J. Glisson/Daily Globe

MEMBERS OF the Wakefield Historical Society pose on Feb. 25 next to a whiteboard list of objectives in the office building of the new Wakefield city garage complex in the industrial park off from U.S. 2. From left are Treasurer Dennis Ferson, Secretary Donna Ferson, Trustee Jan Oberg (seated), Vice President Bella Schroeder, and President Harold Schroeder.

"He used to visit the museum, and he enjoyed it," said Harold.

According to his obituary, Nyman was born in Wakefield on Aug. 20, 1933. His father, Waino Nyman, had been a miner, and his mother was the former Mildred Nikula.

Richard Nyman arrived in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1952, working in construction and as a commercial fisherman before creating Nyman Equipment Inc. in 1981. His obituary further notes his "strong reputation for integrity" and pride in being the grandson of Finnish immigrants.

Donna said that, before Nyman decided to leave funds to the historical society, he interviewed society officers about their objectives.

He died on Oct. 18, 2019 at the age of 86.

As society president, Harold said that Nyman's largesse has spurred officers to "look closely at our organization," with an eye to the future and broader area objectives.

He said officers want to offer something in Wakefield that will represent the region and "draw people in." Such goals, ideally, could be based in "seed

money," he said, referring to potential grants or additional donations.

For instance, said Harold, "There is no instrument to show the mining and logging industry in this region."

From a treasurer's viewpoint, Dennis agreed that a "seed" base of funds could one day result in a larger museum with "comprehensive area artifacts" and even a role for a museum curator.

He emphasized, however, a measured approach in which ongoing funds are managed in such a way as to serve all needs — whether ongoing practical maintenance or "grand" ideals — in a manner that pays the bills for decades to come.

Harold also noted that, although their announcement of the recent windfall has amounted to "a coming out party," the officers are, nevertheless, "taking small steps."

All of the officers relish the opportunity to learn from what other historical organizations and facilities do to honor the heritage of their own locales.

Donna said the society has a lifetime membership in other local historical societies and added that she and other officers also appreciate support from the city of Wakefield.

Bella said that she said she and Harold like to visit history museums whenever they travel. "The one in Wausau is amazing," she noted in relation to the Marathon County Historical Society.

"We do forts," said Donna regarding her own explorations with Dennis.

Harold explained that all four of the officers visited the Marquette Regional History Center, which he called "a marvelous place" with "an excellent library."

He added that the Michigan History Center, run by the state, offers historical programs and voiced hope that society members now can attend some of them.

"There's all sorts of help out there," said Dennis. "We just haven't been able

to avail ourselves of it."

Officers also plan to check Gogebic Community College and the Michigan State University Extension Office in Bessemer for further insight.

Overall, said Dennis, "We're looking for some brainpower."

Donna said society members also have a continuing interest in presenting programs of interest to the public.

"There are wonderful presenters in the area," she said. "We have wonderful movies, wonderful CDs, but there's no place to show them."

Jan Oberg, a society trustee said the local museum lacks the space to offer programs, and Dennis added that attempts to offer them in outdoor settings such as Eddy Park are not ideal due to weather concerns or other logistical issues.

"We need to get the school more involved," Donna said, suggesting — as one example — that students from the Wakefield-Marenisco K-12 School could participate in an old-timey laundry day, scrubbing with washboards and hanging clothes on the line.

"The kids would love doing that," she said,

adding that they also could play with museum toys and engage in other outdoor activities.

Once the museum is heated, Bella said it will be easier to invite kids to that setting.

According to Harold, the Wakefield Historical Society operates under the management of seven trustees, including the four officers and three trustees: Denise Haas, Mary Nurmi and Oberg.

Dennis said they also have "maybe a dozen volunteers at most."

"Our median age is 75 years," said Donna. "We need young people to be involved even if they just come to give us ideas."

Oberg emphasized the need for volunteers, with Donna explaining that they "don't need to know anything."

"What they have to have is an interest," said Oberg.

Society members meet on the second Monday of each month, with the next meeting scheduled for April 11 at 5:30 p.m. in the office building of the city garage complex in the industrial park.

For more information, visit the society's Facebook page or call the Schroeders at 906-224-7161 or the Fersons at 906-224-0075.



P.J. Glisson/Daily Globe

THE WAKEFIELD Historical Society Museum is shown here on March 10 on the main street of Wakefield.

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Workers recall life at Marenisco sawmill

By CHARITY SMITH
csmith@yourdailyglobe.com

MARENISCO — The small town of Marenisco was once home to a thriving lumber-mill business, which employed upwards of 100 men. The steam mill was first opened by William Bonifas in 1909. Bonifas merged with Kimberly Clark paper company in the 1940s to become the United Lumber Company.

"It ran the town," said Dave Hagen, president of the Marenisco Historical Society, of the mill.

The mill was located on the south end of the town next to the Presque Isle River.

Water from the river was used to make steam for the mill's steam engines.

One of the main steam engines is still on display in the park in Marenisco.

According to Hagen, the former mill building is used as a storage facility.

Former mill employees Rick Niemi, Jim Rouse, and Andy Walin worked at the plant between 1967 and 1976 told the Daily Globe of the harsh conditions at the mill. They said that not only did the weather conditions make it a difficult job, but injuries on the job were a concern. They knew of two that died on the job. Rouse said it was easy to tell how much seniority a mill employee had by how many fingers and limbs they had left.

"It was hard, dangerous work," said Walin. "It was



Charity Smith/Daily Globe

ANDY WALIN, from left, Rick Niemi and Jim Rouse stand in front of a steam engine in Memorial Park in Marenisco on Friday morning. The engine was used to drive the Kimberly Clark lumber mill in Marenisco, where they once worked.

hard and dangerous because OSHA wasn't too involved at the time and everything was open."

Rouse said the man who "broke him in" to the job was killed while working at the plant. He said nothing was safe about that place by today's standards.

In spite of the danger, the men said they enjoyed working there as they made a lot of good friends and it was stable work.

The plant processed lumber for a variety of things including flooring and wood chips. The mill closed in 1976 shortly after the company overhauled it to convert it from steam power, to electric.

"They sunk a whole bunch of money into it, converted it to electric and then after they got it all built up, they closed it. They didn't run it very long after they converted it," said Rouse.

Rouse said there were several mills in Marenisco that date "way back." He

said he has no idea why they closed, but he thinks they just got out of the lumber business.

Rouse recalled, that before he started, logs were floated down the river to the mill. He said some logs that didn't get to their destination can still be found at the side of the river.

He said the dam on M-64 that was originally built as a logging dam to hold back the water to float logs to the mill.

"Between the dam and the mill there were rapids and you needed an extra surge of water to carry the logs over the rapids so they had that dam their to build up a head of water to carry the logs," he said.

Some of the mill employees were tasked

with catching the logs, Rouse said.

After a while, they stopped floating logs and began using the railroad more, he said, adding this happened when they converted from pine to hardwood, "as you cannot float hardwood logs."

"Marenisco was built on the railroad and then from there they would run railroads out into the woods to get the logs out of the woods," said Rouse. "They'd cut them at the mill and then they'd use railroad cars to take them out."

He said that men would log in the winter time, because everything was frozen and you could "put a road anywhere you wanted." In the summertime, he said they would build log-

ging camps and roads.

Rouse theorizes that the huge lumber mill industry in Marenisco and across the region went away as a lot of the "big timber is just gone."

"A lot of these logs you see on these log trucks around here are just for pulp wood for paper mills," said Rouse. "Not as much for lumber anymore."

Back in the day the mill would produce thousands of board feet of lumber, per day, Rouse said. According to Rouse the amount of lumber that gets hauled nowadays is "pretty small" compared to what it used to be.

"It takes a hundred years to make a good tree. Who wants to wait that long," he said.

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JIM ROUSE, from left, Andy Walin and Rick Niemi look over photos of a former mill in Marenisco where they once worked. A couple of the photos are seen below including a covered part of the yard and loads of lumber entering the dry kiln.



Cole uses Douglass to help fight oppression

By CHARITY SMITH
csmith@yourdailyglobe.com

IRONWOOD — Steven A. Cole, of Ironwood, a living history presenter, uses his skills as an impersonator to help fight oppression in this country.

“I use Frederick Douglass so that people can see that there was a time in the United States when black people were treated as property, that’s a historical fact,” said Cole. “It’s easy for us to just say that without having a compassionate sense, although I have free ancestors who I can trace back, I also have enslaved ancestors who I can’t trace, and have no idea who they were and where they came from.”

Cole has tri-racial ancestry — African, European, and Native American. He is the fifth-great-grandson of William Pettiford, a “free negro” who fought in the American Revolutionary War and the third-great-grandson of an estranged slave, said Cole.

As such, Cole is a member of the Sons of the American Revolution. He grew up in Freeport, Illinois, where Douglass, a 19th century abolitionist, gave two of his famous speeches.

Cole said he found he had a lot of similarities in background to Douglass through his ancestry and when he found out that Douglass had given speeches in his hometown in 1853 and 1854, he decided to impersonate him.

“The basis in scripture says treat other people the way you want to be treated. When I go around the United States and I see the outright hatred; then to make things interesting rather than speak as Steve Cole, I take on the persona of Frederick Douglass,” Cole said.

“My family history mirrors American history and elements in Douglass’s life are also present in my family history,” said Cole, who has an escaped slave in his ancestry. Douglass escaped slavery and organized himself with other free people, setting out to see the end of slavery.

“So all of these elements are in my own family’s history and Douglass was also of mixed ancestry,” said Cole. “Douglass desired to be a free man, and my third-great-grandfather fought in the Civil War.”

Cole worked for 45 years in industrial construction, building nuclear power plants. He recalled a time when he was 25 and working on a \$3 million project in Rockford, Illinois, and how his coworkers expressed their displeasure with working with a Black man. He said they stuffed some clothes with rags and placed a hard hat on the figure with his name on it. They also left signs with racial slurs on it that said the KKK had been there, and threatened his life.

Cole said that when he went to tell his Polish-American boss of the incident, his boss said that it seemed they both were fighting oppression and revealed that he was a Holocaust survivor, by showing him a distinctive tattoo on his arm. Cole said the experience taught him that all types of nationalities experience this type of oppression.

“When I see the willful division in our country, I say willfully because after 150 years we should have learned the lesson that we are a better nation when all of our citizens are treated with decency and respect,

and yet there are those who drive a wedge between themselves and those who look different or have different lifestyles. So yes, I am inspired to speak up,” said Cole.

He said over the last 25 years he has given Douglass presentations at grade schools, middle schools, high schools, colleges, libraries, museums, assisted living facilities and churches all over the country.

Cole said he was first introduced to living history presentations, at large scale Civil War reenactments. He has performed as Douglass at Gettysburg.

Cole said he grew up singing negro spirituals and gospel music with his family vocal group, “The Singing Coles,” and has been performing all of his life.

“A lot can be learned from Frederick Douglass,” said Cole. “He made it his business to show that people of African ancestry were not inferior. Also, the uneducated were more easily held in perpetual bondage. He was a women’s rights man and insisted that women should also be recognized and treated as equal citizens. Douglass was a Christian and believed that slavery was not of God. Mr. Douglass also believed that slavery could be abolished through legislative means rather than war and violence.”

Cole said he’s proud he graduated college and “proved that a young black man can get a job, go to work, and retire with benefits in this country.”

He said that people should know that racism and prejudice is not from birth, it is learned and taught.

“I don’t want my grandkids to go through life with prejudices,” he said. “Our differences are just the potpourri of America, which we all bring a little piece to the table.”

Submitted photo/
Charity Smith/Daily Globe

STEVE COLE, at right, of Ironwood, portrays 19th century abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Below, he pages through a scrapbook.



Submitted photo

STEVE COLE, visits the grave of William Day, his fourth-great-grandfather, in Lawrence County, Illinois. Day’s uncle died at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War.

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Museum's oldest artifact dates to 1700s

By P.J. GLISSON
news@yourdailyglobe.com

IRONWOOD — Thanks to a recent donation, the Historic Ironwood Depot and Museum has what is now its oldest artifact: a trade axe believed to be more than 300 years old.

“That’s the oldest artifact we have right now,” said Rod Smith, president of the Ironwood Historical Society. “It was discovered about a mile east of Lake Superior.”

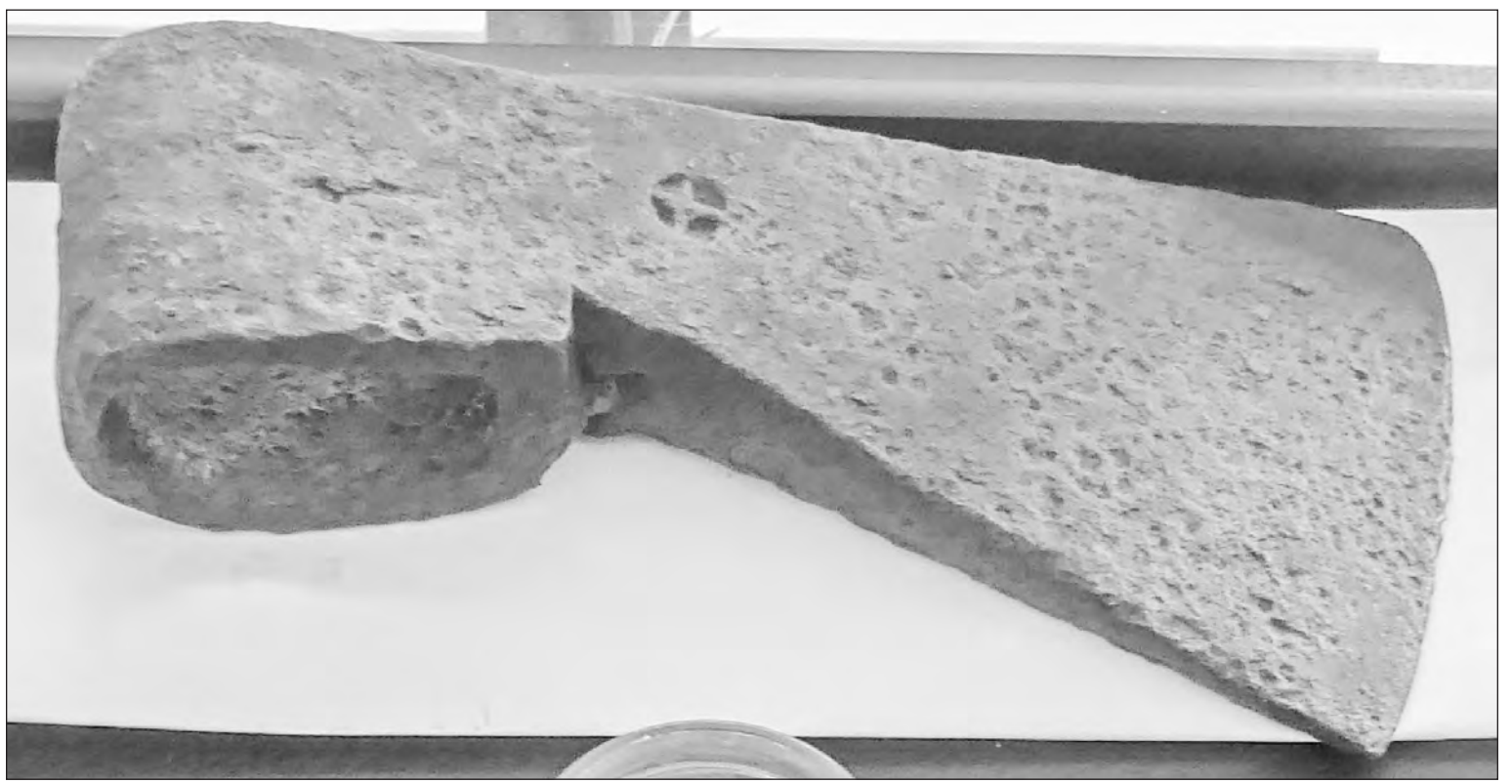
Smith told the Globe last week that Josh Oja, a Minnesota resident who grew up in Ironwood, found the axe in the 1990s.

“When he found this, he was just a boy,” said Smith. “His father (Dennis Oja) owned the land, so Josh was just out exploring.”

Smith said that the Ojas were unaware of the axe’s history until Dennis Oja mentioned it to him and, as Smith put it, “I had a feeling.”

Smith continued, “I knew the history of French fur traders trading with the local tribe.” He added that those members were ancestors of the current Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians in Ashland, Wisconsin.

As he explained, “The French would trade these for furs — beaver, deer hides, muskrat.



P.J. Glisson/Daily Globe

SHOWN HERE on March 9 is a Biscayne trade axe, circa 1700, on display at the Historic Ironwood Depot and Museum. Rod Smith, president of the Ironwood Historical Society, said that the item donated by the Oja Family in Ironwood is now the museum's oldest artifact.

Beaver hats were all the rage in the late 1600s, early 1700s. Probably around 1700-1710 was when this was traded.”

In describing the one-pound axe, Smith said. “It’s pure iron.”

He indicated that a “short cross” marking on the axe —

which he emphasized makes the item “even more special” — is associated with medieval times.

Moreover, noted Smith, “This is in excellent shape.”

He said that iron poles from medieval times also still exist in Europe.

“People wonder how they can last that long,” he said, adding that they have a protective coating that prevents them from rusting.

The axe head on display at the museum does not have a handle. “They would just find a

sapling and probably whittle it down and let it dry,” said Smith while assuring that it then would serve as an apt handle to secure within the axe head cavity, which was designed with a rise in the metal to catch and secure the wood.

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Region turns to tourism as mines close

WAKEFIELD — Bruce Cox, a local author and historian, shared with the Daily Globe some of his insights on the gradual shift from mining to tourism as the primary industry of the region.

“When the iron mines were going, there were many different kinds of work available. Some people worked in the offices, some were carpenters, some were company policemen; some men worked on the surface, and others went underground as timbermen, miners, trammers,” Cox wrote in an email.

Miners typically lived near the mine, within walk-

ing distance.

“Some of the mining companies built houses for their employees, as in Montreal, Wisconsin, and some of the old mining locations — Ramsay for example. Both these places were under the Oglebay Norton Co.,” said Cox.

But most of the people who worked in or at the mines bought or built their homes, he said. “They usually lived close to the mine and walked to work in the old days.”

As the mines closed some in the area embraced the tourism industry as a way to make a living, including the building of ski resorts.

“Tourism really picked up after Indianhead Mountain opened in December 1959, and was followed a few years later by Powderhorn,” said Cox.

Big Powderhorn Mountain opened in Ironwood Township in 1964. Blackjack Ski Resort in Bessemer Township and Whitecap Mountains in Upson, Wisconsin, were also built and drew skiers to the area.

But Cox contends tourism had been around the Northwoods long before the mines closed. Hunting and fishing brought people to the area, and Cox contends even the fresh air was marketed, although it doesn’t work so well for him today.

“I get the impression from old brochures and ads that there was more tourism here 100 years ago,” he said. “They used to advertise the Northland as a good place to escape hay fever, etc. Today, we have weeds growing all over the place. I have an allergy that begins about mid-August and doesn’t go away until it snows and covers the weeds.”

“Tourism in the old days revolved around the



Daily Globe file photo

THE PLUMMER Mine head frame is located in Iron Belt, Wis.

lakes, and there were numerous resorts where people of means would spend time,” he said. “When the Depression came in the 1930s, a lot of this woodland property was abandoned for taxes, and the federal government made a deal to acquire hundreds of thousands of acres that became part of the federal forest service lands.”

Even a closed mine was seen as an opportunity for tourism, he said.

“When the Sunday Lake mine closed in Wakefield in 1961, some people attempted to secure the lease and keep the pumps going for a while so it wouldn’t fill up with water. They gave mine tours,” said Cox. “It was advertised in

big letters painted onto the galvanized steel roof of the shack you see when driving into town from the east, the old building on the left as you approach Hancock Street. This only lasted a short time.”

Cox lamented that the steel head frames of the mines were torn down in the years after the mine closures. They could have helped remind people of the area’s history.

“Not a single one was left standing, except for the one at the old Plummer mine near Iron Belt, Wisconsin, which they had forgotten about,” he said. “Having more than one around would have represented another possible tourist attraction.”

—Daily Globe

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Zachary Marano/Daily Globe

THE TURN to Big Powderhorn Mountain ski resort is marked by a statue of skier along U.S. 2 in Bessemer Township.

Camp Mercer CCC interpretive trail open

By CHARITY SMITH
csmith@yourdailyglobe.com

MANITOWISH, Wis. — A new interpretive trail allows people to view and learn about the Civil Conservation Corps and what it did for society on both a local and national level.

The trail is located at the site of Camp Mercer, in Manitowish, which was one of the larger CCC camps in the state of Wisconsin.

It features 23 interpretive signs along a 3.5-mile trail loop. The signs depict a variety of things about the camp and the CCC itself, and provide photos of what the camp once looked like.

A dynamite shack is the only intact structure that remains at the site. However, remnants of Camp Mercer's roads and foundations are still visible along with evidence of earlier logging camps and other activity.

"When you walk the grounds, you really get a sense of what it must have been like 85 years ago when the camp was busy as a beehive with 200 young men, a couple dozen officers and people

coming and going all day long," said Bill Jamerson, an Ironwood-based CCC historian. "The C's not only restored the natural resources, but they spent an average of \$5,000 a month in nearby towns which helped the local merchants."

Jamerson said the signs and the sight of the remnants of the old building really bring the camp to life.

"There are thousands of people across the state of Wisconsin who had family members in the CCC and they will seek out this park making it an important historical attraction," he said.

Development of the interpretive trail at Camp Mercer was a collaborative project of the Northern Highlands American Legion State Forest, the Wisconsin Historical Society and state archaeologists, the Manitowish Waters Historical Society, and the Iron County Outdoor Recreation Enthusiasts.

"The MWSH is pleased to be part of the Camp Mercer Interpretive Trail that celebrates the fantastic accomplishments by



Submitted photo

THIS POST card of the Civil Conservation Corps Co. 666 camp in Manitowish, Wis., shows early housing in tents. The photo was provided by the Manitowish Waters Historical Society.

CCC in the Northwoods," said Jim Bokern, president of MWSH, in a press release. "This American story has deep roots in our communities, with the conservation ethic and hard work of the CCC still visible in our forests, lakes and streams."

Camp Mercer was established along the banks of the Manitowish River as the CCC 660th Company S-79 in 1933. The camp opened in 1933, and was one of the earliest, according to Wisconsin Conservation Commission documents, of 182 CCC camps that were launched as part of president Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, between 1933 and the start of World War II.

During its peak the camp was

home to more than 200 men and served as one of 14 state forestry camps. The services of the men at this camp provided fire protection, tree planting, lake and stream conservation, and other natural resource protection for Wisconsin's Northwoods.

In exchange for their labor, the men were able to provide for their families, as all but \$5 of their monthly stipend was sent back to their families.

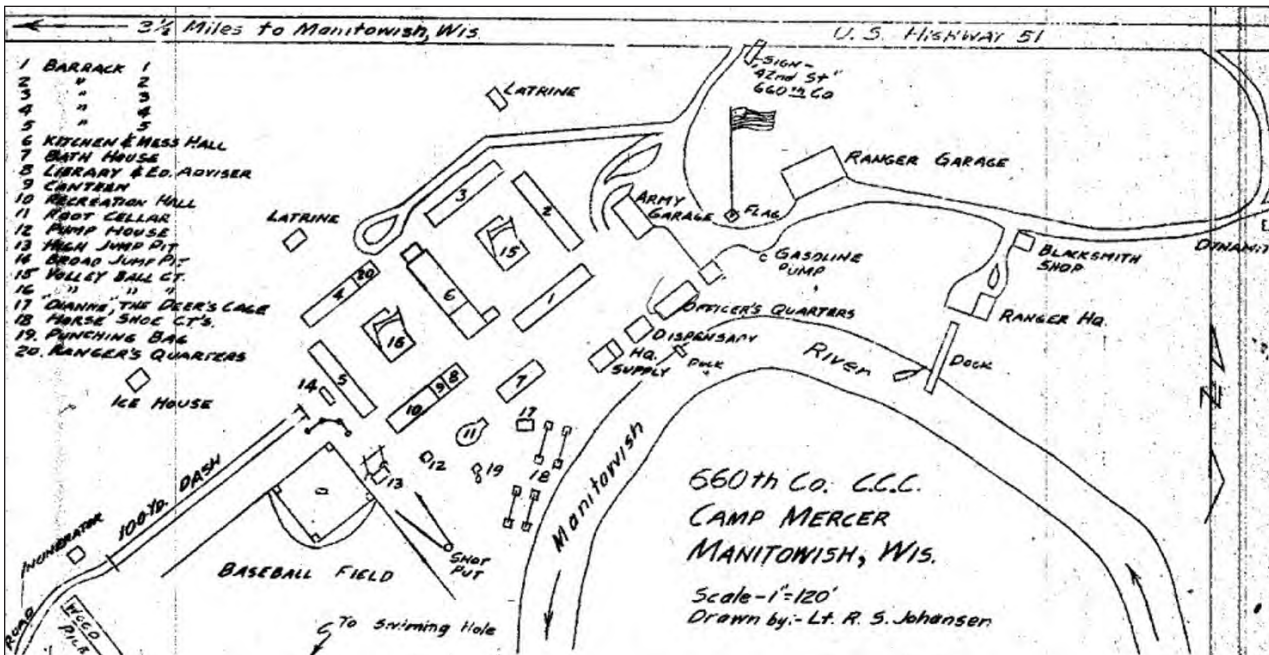
"Nearly all CCC camps in northern Wisconsin were located in the woods, far from nearby towns. What makes this camp so unique is its proximity to Manitowish Waters, and that it was built next to the river," Jamerson said. "It is a beautiful setting for a

park and people will want to return once they've walked the grounds."

The trail is maintained by ICORE, which has a land-use agreement with the NHAL to do so. The MECCA Trails Association also provides support for maintenance of the trail.

The trail can be accessed from the Mercer Bike Trail near the U.S. 51 wayside or from the west side of Circle Lily Creek on Manitowish River Access Road in Manitowish.

Bokern and a NLDC naturalist will offer further incite on the camp and the CCC boys during a hike on along the trail at 1 p.m. on May 13. Register online at discoverycenter.net.



Submitted image

THIS MAP of the Civil Conservation Corps Co. 666 Camp Mercer in Manitowish, Wis., shows layout of the camp along the Manitowish River. The image was provided by the Manitowish Waters Historical Society.

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Submitted photos

THESE POST cards, above and below, show the Civil Conservation Corps Co. 666 camp in Manitowish, Wis. The photos were provided by the Manitowish Waters Historical Society.



Charity Smith/Daily Globe

THE TRAILHEAD for the Camp Mercer CCC interpretive trail is located on the west side of Circle Lily Creek on Manitowish River Access Road in Manitowish, seen here on Saturday.

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Watersmeet

From page 4

1800s,” after which “Americans quickly came to dominate the automotive industry in the first half of the 20th Century.”

The same site touts Henry Ford’s mass-production techniques, which in turn led to a burgeoning auto industry that included Chrysler and GM.

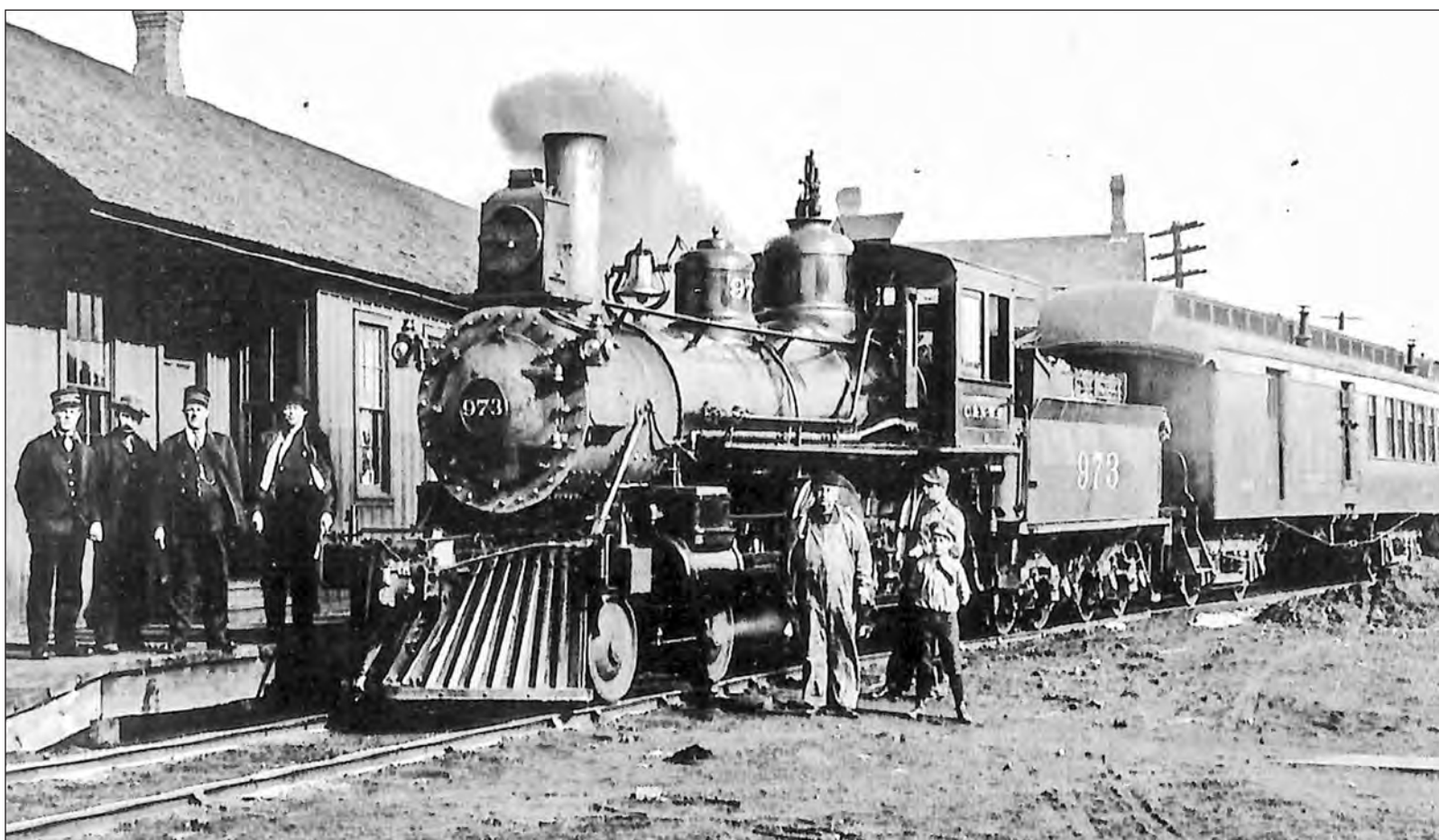
Hence, with every decade that passed in the 20th Century, the timeline by “Michigan’s Railroad History” shows a decline in railroad miles, along with multiple reports of discontinued services and related track removals.

The same source reports the growing strength of the standard road system.

Moreover, a report titled “Facts of the Gogebic Range” notes that local mines – which mostly fizzled out by the mid-20th Century – led to a discontinuation of passenger trains.

Once that happened, Zelinski said the Watersmeet Depot was no longer needed. He happened to be the chamber director at that time as well, and he said he tried to save it.

However, he said railroad authorities required that it be moved from its site, which was not practical for Watersmeet Township. Hence, railroad officials demolished the struc-



Submitted photo

MEMBERS OF an unknown train crew stand ready for action by a train in the former Watersmeet Station. The undated image provided by Frank Kucevar is from historical archives.

ture. Ultimately, said Zelinski, the township purchased the property where the depot once existed.

Regarding the fading of trains, Zelinski said, “It was sort of an untenable situation because trucks had started taking over.”

He said it was no longer profitable for trains to move wood, and with mines also closing, there

was no justification in that region for the expense in running trains.

There were attempts to forestall the inevitable. For instance, a tourist train began operating between Mellon, Wis., and Bessemer in 1993, but it died out by 1995.

Rogers said it was a shame to lose train service in general, but once the industry was gone, Zelinski

said that – in his region – he pushed the Watersmeet Township and forest service to buy the railroad grades.

Many of those routes now serve as pathways for today’s hiking, ATV and snowmobile trails.

For many people, railroads now are a fond nod to history or a hobby, as for Hans Schlegel of Two Rivers, Wis., who has craft-

ed a model railroad of this region.

However, remaining railway lines in this general area still employ people in the field – just not as many as once existed.

One of them is C.J. Sukanen of Hurley, who works as an engineer for Lake Superior & Ishpeming Railroad, which is headquartered in Marquette.

Sukanen credits all of

his operational learning from former railroader friends who died back in the 1990s. He recalled with a nostalgic tone their own take on the passing of an industry so iconic to the building of the nation at large:

“They said if you’d told them in the 1950s that there would be no trains here, they never would have believed it.”



Submitted photo

EVIDENCE OF the role trains played for the logging industry is shown in this undated image from historical archives relating to the former Watersmeet Station, where trains ran for a century from the late 1800s to the late 1900s. Frank Kucevar provided the image.



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Mine collapses forced residents to relocate, caused road problems

By ZACHARY MARANO
zmarano@yourdailyglobe.com

The mines in the western Upper Peninsula and Wisconsin’s Northwoods have long been closed, but sometimes the history buried underneath local communities pushes its way back to the surface.

In the years after the closing of the mines, there used to be signs reading “Caving Ground – Travel at Your Own Risk” on Anvil Road in Bessemer.

“For years we’ve taken these signs pretty much for granted,” the July 12, 1976, edition of the Bessemer Pick and Axe says. “All of that changed at least to some small degree a week and a half ago when a hole about 30 feet in diameter opened up in the side of Anvil Hill.”

This cave-in came as a surprise, according to the article, because “subsidence and caving had come to be regarded as problems of the past or as phenomena restricted to the other



Larry Holcombe/Daily Globe

ANVIL ROAD crosses Summit Drive in Bessemer Township near the site of former mining operations.

end of the Gogebic Range, from Hurley on westward.”

In the late 1930s, a large number of homes were erected at a site along Sunset Road in Ironwood Township to relocate people from the city Ironwood when the land under and around their homes was found to be unstable due to mining operations. This was known as the Ironwood Resettlement Project. Much of this caved in area that stretches across part of Ironwood south of downtown is now part of the

Miners Memorial Heritage Park.

Over the border in Wisconsin, mine caving was also a problem in the late 1960s through at least the mid-1970s. Several holes opened up in the ground near the Cary Mine site in Montreal, including one near the Gile ballpark.

A Bessemer Historical Society spokesperson the Anvil Road collapse in the summer of 1976 was not the first time that a portion of Anvil Road collapsed.

“There always used to be houses along that road. There no longer are,” said the spokesperson. “In the late ‘30s, there was a cave-in around the road there, too.”

In 1976, it took several days before crews could fill the hole with rock, dirt and trees, because the fill would slide into the depths below.

On further inspection, crews discovered a cavern that was either mined too close to the surface or created through rockfalls. Only a thin shell of rock was holding 15 feet of soil and vegetation back from total collapse.

The mines were deep, according to the spokesperson. The nearby Palms mine was 2,100 feet deep and it joined with the Anvil mine.

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Keweenaw Land Association donates land records

By P.J. GLISSON
news@yourdailyglobe.com

IRONWOOD — As of last week, the Ironwood Historical Society received a treasure trove of information regarding land records going back for countless years.

“I’m beside myself,” said Rod Smith, society president. “I’m just so excited. This is one of the biggest contributions we’ve received.”

Representatives of the Keweenaw Land Association, Ltd., headquartered in Ironwood, were present on March 9 to make the formal presentation to Smith at the Historic Ironwood Depot and Museum.

“They tend to be either plat books or ledger books,” said Timothy Lynott, president of the KLA. “We’re glad that they’re going to be preserved.”

Lynott said that the KLA, which historically has been known as a forest products and

land management company, sold its timberland assets last year and now intends to focus on its mineral assets.

“For a local historian, this is the equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” said Smith, who described the books as “fascinating” and filled with “tons of knowledge.”

Paula Aijala, KLA secretary, said that the company’s change in direction means that the books, which include land records in relation to timber and mineral assets, no longer were needed in that office.

“It’s something that isn’t usable for us any longer, but you don’t want to throw them away,” she said.

Smith said that Brian Głodowski, president of the Ironwood Rotary Club, approached him to gauge his interest in acquiring the books for the museum.

“I was just astounded,” said Smith, who later added, “It’s



P.J. Glisson/Daily Globe

POSING IN front of a table full of ledgers and land records on March 9 are, from left, Timothy Lynott, president of the Keweenaw Land Association; Paula Aijala, KLA secretary; and Rod Smith, president of the Ironwood Historical Society. The KLA donated the records to the society’s museum within the Historic Ironwood Depot.

going to be sheer joy going through all these books.”

Smith said he hopes, in perusing the books, to see whether any of the names of Civil War veterans noted on the walls of Iron-

wood’s Memorial Building also are shown within the land records.

According to Smith, the newly-donated collection will be placed in the museum archive.

“If anybody wishes to see these, they will need to make an appointment,” he said, adding that viewing and photographing of pages will be permissible with supervision.

Carnegie

From page 2

part of the publication of 1976, the Diamond Jubilee Committee gathered letters from former librarians, asking them to speak about their time in the Carnegie Library.

Some spoke of how things had changed since leaving, such as Elsie (Medlyn) Arnett, who served the library from 1920-1928. During this time, Ironwood had a population of 18,000, and the library held 17,700 volumes.

“We all know how times have changed. I remember that patrons were permitted to borrow just two books at a time. I was instrumental in changing that rule so they could borrow as many books as they could reasonably carry away. Needless to say, it gave the circulation department a big boost,” Amett wrote.

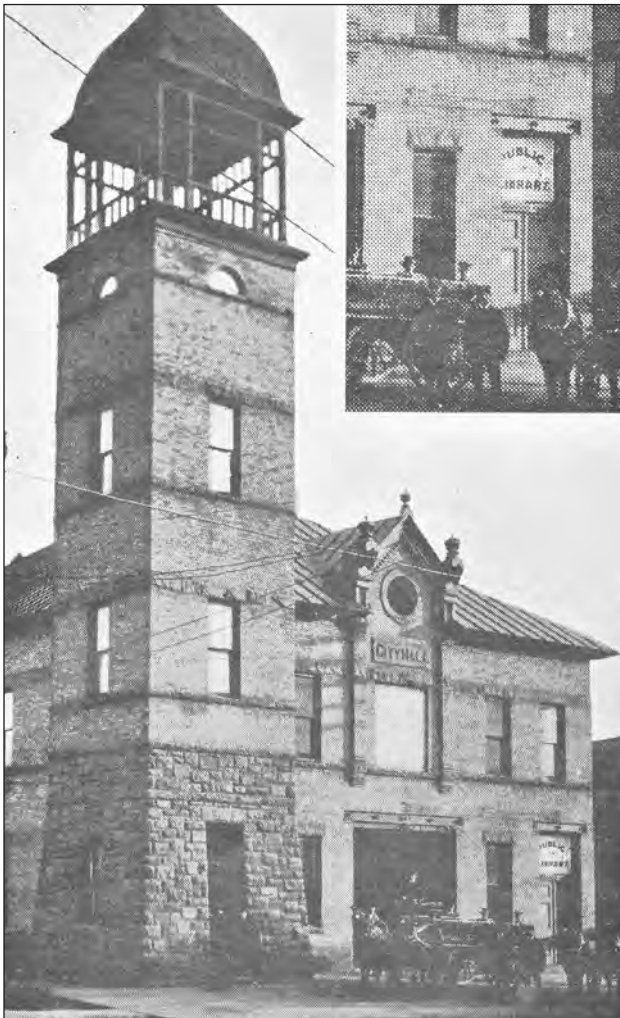
“The budget was another item of interest. As I recall, one year the figure of \$5,000 was decided upon. Of this amount, approximately \$3,700 was for salaries which included we three librarians and also Ole Nicholson, the janitor. As you can see, that left about \$1,300 for new books and magazines. It is surprising to remember how much \$1,300 could buy in those days,” Amett wrote.

And others spoke fondly of their time in the area, such as Runa (Kastman) Farb, the children’s librarian who served from 1935-1937. During her time, Ironwood had a population of 20,000, and the library hosted 19,000 volumes.

In her letter, she wrote: “The work was interesting, the children were fun; they seemed to enjoy the books in the library. Most of my time was spent with them, although occasionally my work was at the main desk when the other attendants were gone.”

Farb recalled mending books in the basement rooms. “This was something I had learned in working at our college library,” she wrote. “Pages were mended and covers were renewed with special mending cloth made for that purpose. There was no extra money in the library fund to throw away old books and to buy many new books. ... It was a pleasure to help people find facts and information that they wanted, as well as to encourage both old and young to read books. The people who came to the library were the kind and pleasant ones; they had an interest in life and the things going on around them.”

The love for the area and of the people within it is a sentiment all of the letters seem to share, with



Submitted photo

THE FORMER Ironwood City Hall included city offices, the fire and police departments, as well as the city library on the second floor. The inset shows the library sign over the public entrance. The building stood on McLeod Avenue where the Gogebic County Transit building now stands.

many expressing thanks to the community for the time they served.

“As I saw Ironwood in the 1950s, the people were gracious, generous, proud and sensitive,” wrote Norman J. Bunker, librarian from 1950-1954. “So much kindness was shown to me and my family, it is still my ‘professional’ hometown. Ironwood Carnegie was my ‘first’ library, and it will always be that.”

Recent history

The Ironwood Carnegie Library has seen many renovations, repairs, and projects over the years. Wiercinski provided a list of some of the most major projects over the last few decades.

1972 — The library moved its children’s section from the first floor to

the basement level, so their non-fiction collection could be moved upstairs. During this time the library office was also moved to a more convenient location.

2009 — The children’s room got a makeover and was renovated in what was first meant to be a small project. Wiercinski explained that the space was waterproofed and underwent repairs to the walls and floors. During this renovation new shelving was added, and the space was painted. She also said that during this renovation carpeting was installed in a portion of the basement, which was later removed and the floors were painted.

2010 — The Early Childhood Resource Library was implemented. The library

partnered with the Great Start Collaborative to implement their Early Childhood Resource Library, which offers educational toys, games and puzzles for use in the library that aim to support early literacy.

2011 — The library was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

2016 — In 2016, the library underwent repairs and restoration after receiving a grant from the Michigan Housing Development Authority to perform exterior restorations on the building. These restorations included repairing the historic sandstone sills and corbels, maintaining the railings on the exterior of the library, and replacing the front door. The new front door better matched the original door, but with windows. Wiercinski said they liked the idea of the front door having windows.

Daily operations

According to Wiercinski, as a public library, the Carnegie Library is part of the city of Ironwood. “But as far as how we operate, our budget is independent,” she said. “There is a millage every year that helps to support our library ... it’s part of our funding.”

The millage is set at 0.9611 mil.

The building, according to Wiercinski, is owned by the city, but the facility and operations are managed by the library’s board.

“All maintenance, all renovation, anything that needs to happen to this building is covered through the library’s budget. Our board is a governing board, it makes its own decisions,” she said. “If we need our roof repaired, it’s up to us to look at our budget and determine how we can do that. We cover all of our costs.”

She explained that the library’s budget covers everything from book purchases, utilities and snow removal, to wages.

Future plans

Wiercinski said she is hopeful for the Carnegie Library’s future and its continued growth.

“We are looking at what our needs are now and what they will be in the future,” she said. “Now that we are coming out of COVID and we are realizing what the library is, a lot of things are the same but a lot of things have changed.”

She explained that what she has come to realize is that, “what we thought five years ago really doesn’t apply anymore.”

She said the board is taking a hard look over the next year about what the library will need to be to best serve the community and keep operating for the next 50 years.

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P.J. Glisson/Daily Globe

THE FORMER Bergland Community School — later known as the Bergland Elementary School — is shown here on March 10. The building, which has steadily deteriorated since the end of its final school year in 1997-1998, is now abandoned.

Former Bergland school system has rich history

By P.J. GLISSON
news@yourdailyglobe.com

BERGLAND — An empty building now stands where decades of education once took place in Bergland, near Lake Gogebic.

From 1904-1998, Bergland children had the ease and pleasure of learning their ABCs, as well as subsequent layers of learning, in their own hometown in Ontonagon County.

Throughout the near-century of operation, the school system ran in several locations and under two different districts, and with varying ages of students, depending on the time of operation.

According to LaVonne Niemi of the Bergland-Matchwood Historical Society, the first large, wooden school building opened as a K-12 facility in 1904.

She said that, in 1910, an addition was constructed, but in 1912 the building was destroyed by fire.

As a result, Niemi said there was a period of time when students used the Shamrock Hotel as a temporary school site.

Records show, however, that the present brick school was completed in 1926 on the corner of Maple and North streets. The new location is across the high-

way from the original site on M-28 (North Street).

Niemi noted that the construction of the current building was made possible by the Works Project Administration.

She said that an additional, smaller brick building was constructed on the original site either before, or in conjunction, with the creation of the current building. She lacked access to records that may have confirmed whether that building had been used for a short time as a K-12 facility.

Niemi knows that, from 1926-1938, the current building — labeled in that era as “Bergland High School” — was used for older students, and the additional, smaller, brick building was used for younger students.

Niemi said the smaller brick building burned in 1938, and from 1938-1984, the current site operated as a K-12 facility called the Bergland Community School.

Despite the school’s challenging history, local people still have fond memories of the current structure, and one of them shared hers with the Globe last week.

Winnie Borseth and her husband, Jim, graduated from Bergland Community School in 1954.

Later, their first three children also graduated from the school, and their fourth child attended there in his early years.

Borseth, who lived only one-half mile from the site, also was a secretary at the school for 25 years until it closed at the end of the 1997-1998 school year.

“And, you know, I loved it,” she said. “I loved the kids. It was a nice little school. Our school was always shiny and clean.”

She recalled “a wonderful lunch program,” “a small library,” and a “real nice” home economics room.

Moreover, she added, “We had a little gym. A lot of good basketball games were played there.”

According to Borseth, the school “played all these small schools,” such as the Marenisco K-12 School, which closed nearly two decades ago.

“Of course, all these small schools are gone now,” she said.

During Borseth’s own time as secretary, the final high school class graduated in 1984. As of the 1984-1985 school year, the school was called the Bergland Elementary School and transferred from the Bergland School District to the Ewen-Trout Creek School District.

Lorraine Fruick, a member of the historical society, said that

the newly-named elementary school then included only students from K-6 grades.

According to Fruick, junior and senior high school students then attended schools in either Wakefield or Ewen.

Ultimately, even the Bergland Elementary School closed in 1998. “It was sad,” said Borseth of the closure. “Once a town loses its school, it’s a big loss.”

For instance, she recalled that, during the school’s existence, “I think the highlight of the year was the annual Christmas program. It was a social event.”

Borseth believes that the whole nature of the community has changed.

She said that, when she was younger, everyone knew who owned each home in Bergland. Now, she mused, that’s no longer the case because many homes are owned by seasonal inhabitants.

After spending her final year as a secretary — her 26th year — at the Ewen-Trout Creek School, Borseth has continued to live in Bergland.

Her impression is that the former Bergland school building hasn’t been used much since it was closed.

At this point, she said, “The top floor is right down to the bot-

tom floor. It should be torn down.”

Michelle Hillier, clerk of Bergland Township, told the Globe that the current owner of the school building is not local and bought the property “sight unseen” in August of 2021.

As Hillier noted, “She bought it on a tax sale and now is trying to sell it.”

The clerk said that the woman did not call the township until after she purchased the structure, at which point township officials were frank. “We very bluntly told her that this was not habitable,” said Hillier.

Regarding considerations of condemning the building, Hillier said of the Bergland Township Board, “There’ve been many discussions by the board.”

Hillier concluded, “It’s kind of a confusing prospect. There’s no easy way to describe it. Unfortunately, there’s not much that can be done about it.”

Although the Bergland-Matchwood Historical Society has closed its museum during the COVID-19 pandemic, Niemi said she hopes that members will be able to reopen it before long.

The museum includes an entire room dedicated to Bergland education.



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