

## MENOMINEE RANGE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION HISTORY

In early June, 1958, some 40 residents of the Dickinson County area met at the Dickinson Hotel to discuss the feasibility of organizing a local historical society. The Dickinson County Historical Society was formed, and the following officers were elected June 19: Mrs. Philip Thomas, Iron Mountain, president; U.F. Asselin, Norway, vice-president; Miss Olga Tramontin, Iron Mountain, secretary; and Bud Risberg, Iron Mountain, treasurer. Mrs. George Boyce, Jr. had assumed the office of secretary by mid-October. Board members consisted of Mr. Asselin, Miss Athlyn Bangs and Sumner Robbins, trustees for three years; Mrs. George Hungate and Carl Israelson, for two years; and Mrs. N.C. Bartholomew and Mrs. Thomas, for one year.

Affiliated with the Michigan State Historical Society, the local group was in search of suitable quarters to carry out its proposed work of collecting, indexing and filing historic material. In mid-October the Dickinson County Board of Supervisors granted the group the rent-free use of two basement rooms in the court house.



The society sought advice from representatives of other Upper Peninsula historical societies, particularly in Delta and Marquette counties, and also met with Dr. Louis Beeson, executive secretary of the Michigan Historical Commission, in September, when he passed through Iron Mountain. Later that same month the society planned the dedication of the

Menominee Iron Range historical marker at Fumee Falls Roadside Park in Quinnesec under the leadership of Ward Alquist.

Desiring membership from all cities, villages and townships in the county, the society initiated a week-long membership drive in early October. Four types of memberships were available: (1) active membership, \$2 per year; (2) youth or student membership, 50 cents; (3) contributing membership, \$5 or more, designed for individuals or business establishments desiring to support the program; (4) life membership, \$50. Mrs. N.C. Bartholomew served as chairman of the drive. By early December the membership had climbed to 170, and in February, 1959, membership was expanded to include neighboring Wisconsin communities. Window displays were arranged by Harry Larsen and Mrs. Emmanuel Pancheri to promote the program.

Mrs. George (Gloria) Boyce, Jr. spoke to numerous local social, fraternal and service groups to promote the society's goals and instill an interest in the area's history.

Having set up an acquisition policy and a cataloging system, as well as having acquired suitable quarters, the society began accepting articles for its museum in November, 1958. Mrs. Carl Israelson, museum committee chairman, was assisted by Mrs. Melba Urban, Mrs. Charles Dawe and Ernest Meyer, of Iron Mountain; Mr. and Mrs. U.F. Asselin, of Norway; and Mrs. Emmanuel Pancheri, of Quinnesec.

The group sought material directly related to the early history of the area. Of particular interest were original source materials, such as diaries, letters, personal account books, scrapbooks, books pertaining to local history, photographs and newspapers. Other acceptable materials included articles used by pioneers, early household items, farming tools, mining and lumbering implements, clothing, furniture and other personal items.

The Dickinson County Historical Society hosted the Upper Peninsula Historical Conference at the Dickinson Hotel on August 14-15, 1959, with some 50 people from across the state in attendance. A number of society members gave presentations on various aspects of area history, and an exhibit of mining and lumbering artifacts was displayed. The following month the society set up artifacts to depict an 1880's Victorian parlor at the Dickinson County Fair to stimulate interest in its activities.

Mrs. George (Meredith) Hungate spent long hours at the Carnegie Public Library digging out historical tidbits for her column "Glancing Back," which ran in *The Iron Mountain News* from January, 1960, to May, 1961, under the auspices of the Dickinson County Historical Society.

By the mid-1960's, as members of the society began raising families, involved themselves in additional community projects or moved from the area, the group became inactive.

Another group of public-spirited citizens interested in collecting and preserving records and artifacts relevant to the development of the Menominee Range for exhibition and study established the Menominee Range Historical Foundation, a non-profit educational organization incorporated September 15, 1969. The following spring the vacated Carnegie Public Library was leased from the Iron Mountain Board of Education for use as a museum.

Then, renewed by the enthusiasm generated by the formation of the foundation and the acquisition of the building to house a historical museum and library, members of the inactive Dickinson County Historical Society and others interested in the preservation of the area's heritage met at the Dickinson Hotel July 20, 1970. Following a discussion regarding reorganization, the society members voted to merge with the Menominee Range Historical Foundation and retain the newly-formed foundation's name. A membership drive was organized, fees for single and family memberships being \$3 and \$5 respectively. Donnell Mitchell was appointed temporary chairman for membership and finance. Local support for the museum project was reflected in the membership rolls which numbered 700 by 1971.



The Iron Mountain Board of Education sold the Carnegie Public Library property to the Menominee Range Historical Foundation for one dollar on July 6, 1971, stipulating that the property would revert back to the school district if the foundation ever ceased to use it for a museum.

Shortly thereafter the foundation brought Victor Hogg, former curator of the Michigan State Museum in Lansing and then an interpretative development planner specializing in museum work, to Iron Mountain to inspect the facility. Hogg stated that the building had "definite architectural merit," was "structurally sound, and well adapted to museum use with minimal remodeling."

Working with meager funds and assisted by a \$5,000 grant from the Dickinson County Board of Supervisors, the foundation began the renovation of the building in the spring of 1972 with Charles Ballario serving as building superintendent. A second grant of \$5,000 was made to the foundation by the county board the following year.

During the first year of renovation, rubbish was hauled from the building, walls were knocked out where necessary to establish the traffic pattern, and a general cleaning of the building and grounds including repair work was undertaken. During the latter part of the summer all the display areas were roughed in, and sixty display booths were ready to be decorated and filled with artifacts by the end of the year. A new concrete floor was poured in the basement after the existing wooden floor, badly warped and rotted through in several places, had been removed. Stairways from the basement to the ground floor and from the ground floor to the second floor were removed and widened for better traffic flow. Basement

windows on the north and east sides were closed with cement block as a security measure, and a new gas furnace was installed.

Various professional and service groups, as well as area businessmen, agreed to be responsible for displays, and began work on their respective projects. Barn siding and timbers used to panel a portion of the basement display area were obtained from five old area barns located through the efforts of Dr. Clifford Tobin and donated by owners Sid Ashby, Rudy Johnson, Herb Race and the Charmin Paper Company.

The Foundation's Board of Directors at this time consisted of the following: Albert C. Hoyle, president; Robert C. Hoyle, vice-president; Donnell Mitchell, secretary-treasurer; Esau Cohodes, Dr. John Newkirk and N. Dean Turner. The Dickinson County Historical Society's officers were: Dr. John Newkirk, president; Stuart Belhumeur, vice-president; and N. Dean Turner, secretary.

Concerned about the financial security necessary to maintain the new museum, the Foundation's Board of Directors instituted a trust fund. The initial impetus for the establishment of this fund came from Robert C. Hoyle and Audrey Hoyle, who donated their share of a parcel of land sold in Lake County, Illinois, and added cash for a total gift of \$21,000. Announcement of this donation was made in *The Iron Mountain News* October 11, 1972. The Hoyles designated \$1,000 of this amount to be used to inaugurate the Menominee Range Historical Foundation Founders' Club Plaque which they subsequently unveiled at the annual meeting of the society November 12, 1974. Persons or groups contributing \$1,000 or more to the trust fund are commemorated on this plaque displayed in the lobby of the museum.

At the time the Hoyles presented the foundation with their gift, they also promised to donate their collection of mining, lumbering and other artifacts accumulated over the years when the community matched this initial gift and those monies were in the trust fund to assure permanent preservation and display. This goal had been met when the plaque was unveiled.

Many members of the community donated countless hours of labor as the displays began taking shape throughout 1973 and the first half of 1974. The Menominee Range Historical Foundation Museum was officially dedicated Saturday, July 6, 1974. Jerry Rowe, president of the Michigan State Historical Commission, was the featured speaker for this important day.

Mrs. Lorn (Margaret) Johnson had been appointed to the Foundation's Board of Directors in January, 1974. In the late fall the following Dickinson County Historical Society officers were elected: Mrs. Ben (Mildred) Cohodes, president; Putnam Robbins, vice-president; Mrs. Marvin (Kathleen) Fayas, secretary. These same officers were re-elected in March, 1975, with the addition of Mrs. George (Meredith) Hungate, treasurer. Mrs. Isabel Gorrow and Mrs. Marion Fortier began to inventory and catalog items donated to the museum in 1974, following a visit to the Marquette Historical Society to study its system.

Several changes occurred on the Foundation's Board of Directors in 1975. Mrs. Marvin (Kathleen) Fayas assumed the office of secretary in September, and later that same month Esau Cohodes died. Mrs. Ben (Mildred) Cohodes was appointed to the board in late October, and N. Dean Turner died in late November.

In April, 1975, Mrs. Olaf (Beatrice) Blomquist was named research coordinator for the Bicentennial Historical Research Project.

V. Robert Payant and Norman Flemington also briefly served on the Foundation's Board of Directors in 1977.

In May, 1977, the Michigan History Commission of the Michigan Department of State notified the Menominee Range Historical Foundation that its museum, the former Carnegie Public Library, had been named to the State Register of Historic Sites. State registration indicates the Michigan History Commission has judged the site to be of significant historic

interest, and also permits the museum to display the official marker approved by the Commission. Purchased by the Dickinson County Chapter of Keep Michigan Beautiful, the marker which now stands in front of the museum was dedicated June 25, 1979. Dr. Martha Bigelow, secretary to the Michigan Historical Commission and supervisor of the Historical Sites Division in Lansing, was the guest speaker at the event.