

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES

William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian



Throughout our nation, indeed throughout the world, there is a wealth of historic information relating not only to major events and accomplishments, but to life as it was lived in communities and counties through the ages. The story of the Menominee Iron Range is no exception.

While there has always been interest in the area's past, curiosity seems to be a growing among current residents, as well as those living in other areas cherishing fond memories of where they once lived.

The Daily News has consistently published historical articles researched by their own staff members, as well as shared by other history buffs through the years. Most recently the "Remember When..." feature allowed many to share historic photographs with informative captions.

The goal of this column – Menominee Range Memories – is to share historical information over a wide variety of topics to help preserve our heritage and allow all of us to learn more about those who explored,

developed, lived, worked and worshipped here before us.

Although most early accounts were not documented by a camera, whenever possible, an historic photograph will accompany the topics contained in this column.

Some topics may require more than one column to tell the story, and will continue from one week to the next.

My first experience with area history began as a senior at Kingsford High School, when I wrote a "History of Dickinson County" as a term paper in my college-prep English class in 1965 – fifty years ago!

Following five years at Michigan State University, a stint in the U.S. Army and four years of teaching Spanish and English in Grayling, Michigan, I returned to the area to teach Spanish at my alma mater in 1976.

The following spring I was hired as manager of the recently-opened Menominee Range Historical Foundation Museum, working during the summer months and occasionally speaking to various groups about area history throughout the year.

Working among the artifacts, photographs and bound volumes of newspapers at the museum reawakened my early interest in the area's history.

In 1978, I laid out *Born From Iron*, Mary Louise Dulan's 258-page history of Iron Mountain written for the city's centennial celebration. My years as an advisor for school yearbooks proved useful in this endeavor, and I also was responsible for the captions.

Beginning in 1979, the Dickinson County Festival of the Arts, under the leadership of the late Margaret "Magee" Johnson, began featuring historic tours as part of the summer's activities. Initially, Dave Curtis, then the director of the Dickinson County Library, and I worked on

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an annual tour. I continued to work on tours through 1993. The topics are varied. These sixteen booklets are available at the Dickinson County Library.

The Dickinson County Genealogical Society was organized February 17, 1977. In January, 1982, the Society began publishing "Dickinson Diggings", now a 20-page quarterly which features items of genealogical and historical interest pertaining to Dickinson County and the surrounding area. I have served as editor since the beginning with other members occasionally contributing information. Check out the Society's website which includes historic photographs and some back issues of "Dickinson Diggings".

When the Cornish Pumping Engine Museum opened in 1984, the Friends of the Museum commissioned me to write a 40-page guidebook. *Iron Mountain's Cornish Pumping Engine and the Mines It Dewatered* is still for sale, outlining much of the Iron Mountain's early mining history.

When the Dickinson County Board of Commissioners began planning the County's centennial celebration to be held in 1991, they asked me what kind of lead time was necessary to produce a book to commemorate the event. I suggested three years. They encouraged me to apply for the task and *Dickinson County, Michigan: From Earliest Times to the Twenties*, a 432-page volume, was published. Hazel Dault admirably handled the biographies of pioneer families.

City of Kingsford Treasurer Roger Scott called me in the fall of 1997 for advice when plans were underway for a book commemorating Kingsford's Diamond Jubilee in 1998. What initially was to be a 60-page book evolved into the 448-page *Kingsford: The Town Ford Built in Dickinson County, Michigan*, as material was compiled during the fall, winter and spring and published in time for the summer

celebration. Nick Gayan, a computer teacher at Kingsford High School, proved an invaluable resource at my first attempt at computer layout, and also was responsible for producing and formatting high school football and basketball athletic records meticulously kept by Art Viens and others over the decades.

All of these publications were a result of collaboration with others passionate about our heritage and willing to share their information. The publications were not a solo effort.

Most of us are familiar with the following African proverb: It takes a village to raise a child. The responsibility of raising a child does not lie in the parents alone, but also with the extended family and in some cases the whole community.

This is also true in preserving our history – our heritage – for this and future generations. It takes more than a few individuals to accomplish this goal, a goal which continues from generation to generation.

Many others have significantly contributed to the preservation and compilation of Dickinson County history over the years, including John Alquist (Quinnesec), Beatrice Blomquist (Breen, Felch and West Branch Townships), Darryl Ertel (Sagola), Jake Menghini (Norway), Joan Oberthaler (Norway), Viola Stevens (Channing) and Dean Turner (Vulcan).

Hazel Dault spent decades and countless hours reading and excerpting information of genealogical interest from the early newspapers, compiling a card catalogue of several hundred thousand cross-referenced cards, as well as copying early marriage and death records from the Dickinson County Courthouse together with D. JoAnn Johnson. Hazel's extensive card catalog is now part of the Menominee Range Historical Museum's collection.

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For a number of years Hazel and I made an annual pilgrimage to copy marriage and death records for our area from the Menominee County Court House, all of which have been published in "Dickinson Diggings".

Recently Guy Forstrom, of Quinnesec, has researched history of the Ford Motor Company's plant in Kingsford (always referred to as the Iron Mountain plant in Ford documentation). In 2011 he published a book titled *Camping in Cloverland with Henry Ford: As Reported by the Newspapers of the Time* which documents the August 15-25, 1923 trip Ford, together with Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone and Edward G. Kingsford took in the Upper Peninsula. Forstrom has also published numerous articles in antique car magazines.

Currently Bill Rosene's Facebook page "You Know You Are From Iron Mountain When..." has gained many on-line followers who enjoy sharing early area photographs and commenting on their remembrances of various places and events, or relating brief histories. Their reminiscences and documentation of the photographs and the information they have shared continue to add to the wealth of our historic heritage.

As I learned more about computers and Power Point programs, scanning historic photographs and postcards almost became an obsession to allow easy access in many formats to these snapshots of our past. With the continued assistance of Nick Gayan, images from my personal collection, as well as from the Menominee Range Historical Museum, the Jake Menghini Museum and numerous individuals, has resulted in a growing archive.

My goal is to share the material I have researched and photographs I have collected over the past 40 years so all who are interested have access to them without charge. Hopefully this collection will inspire

others to continue documenting our past now and in the future.

The Dickinson County Library has provided this venue on its website (www.dcl-lib.org) under the "Local History and Genealogy" tab. Currently there are eleven Power Point presentations available on-line.

In addition, well-captioned photographs from all Dickinson County townships and their respective settlements, the cities of Iron Mountain, Kingsford and Norway are available, as well as sections on the Ford Plant, area schools, the Pine Mountain Ski Tournament and Menominee Range mines.

Photographs from the following neighboring counties are also included: Iron County – Crystal Falls, Iron River; Florence, Florence County – Florence and Spread Eagle; Niagara, Marinette County – Niagara.

In addition, many of my personal files are available at the Library on a designated historical research computer. A future goal is to make these files available to all on line through the Library's website.

My purpose in mentioning all of the above information is to direct those interested in searching to some of the resources available. There's much more to be done.

Hopefully reading "Menominee Range Memories" will make all of us stand a little taller as we recognize the contributions so many dedicated individuals have made over the years to make our area a place we can be proud to call home.