

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 21: The Role of Newspapers in Documenting Early History – Part 1

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian



The Iron Mountain News was established on April 11, 1921, by Frank J. Russell Sr. Pictured here is the Editorial Department office of the newly-established newspaper, taken in about 1922. Thomas J. Masterson, managing editor, was at his typewriter at the left and the man wearing the hat was probably Clyde J. McCauley, telegrapher and sports editor. The woman at the lower left is unidentified. Russell purchased The Tribune-Gazette and The Iron Mountain Press which were merged into the new newspaper. The Tribune was started in 1897, and The Gazette was founded in 1896, the same year as The Iron Mountain Press. Thus, The Iron Mountain News was, in essence, a merger of three early Iron Mountain newspapers. [Menominee Range Historical Museum]

[NOTE: Dates, placed chronologically, are highlighted in boldface red letters for easier reading, and names of individuals and places are highlighted in boldface black letters to facilitate finding information.]

American newspapers were first published in the early 18th century. These colonial newspapers became a political force in the campaign for American independence.

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The importance of a free press among the Founding Fathers resulted in its inclusion in the First Amendment (1791) to the United States Constitution which prohibits Congress from obstructing the exercise of certain individual freedoms: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and the right to petition.

Following the Revolutionary War, newspapers became closely aligned with political parties with the editors often serving as the local party spokesmen. During the early 20th century, prior to the rise of television, the average American read several newspapers per day in larger metropolitan areas.

The nature of American journalism changed beginning in the 1920's, as radio and later television became to play increasingly important competitive roles as news sources.

One reason newspaper accounts play such an important role in documenting an area's early history is that they were written at the time the events occurred. Often extremely detailed, their contemporary nature usually means they are more accurate than later reminiscences. The reporters covering these events probably didn't realize that they were, in fact, writing their community's history.

The evolution of journalism on the Menominee Iron Range began as explorers sought out mines and railroad construction began in the early 1870's. Newspapers in established settlements in the surrounding area began publishing reports on the development of the new iron fields, often through correspondents working on railroad construction or mining pursuits.

Perusing old newspaper columns includes the adventure and thrill of finding answers to questions which long have been a mystery, or encountering something

totally unexpected. Every time a page is turned new possibilities are presented.

One such exciting find was a series of articles describing the building of the **Menominee Range Railroad** which began in the **February 18, 1873** edition of *The Escanaba Tribune*. Established **December 9, 1869**, *The Escanaba Tribune* changed its name to *The Iron Port* beginning with its **October 6, 1877** issue, heralding its status as the **Menominee Iron Range's port**.

The Mining Journal, originally established in **Copper Harbor** on **Lake Superior's Keweenaw Peninsula** in **1846**, began publishing in **Marquette, Marquette County, Michigan**, in the **fall of 1855**. Another exciting discovery, a series of articles on the **Menominee Range Railroad** which began appearing in the **January 27, 1877** edition of *The Mining Journal*, provided additional documentation.

First *The Escanaba Tribune* and then *The Mining Journal* began publishing letters submitted by correspondents connected with the **Menominee Range Railway branch line of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway**, using the pseudonyms "**Racketty**" and "**Wolverine**" respectively, to document the progress being made between **Powers Station**, initially referred to as "**42**", and the new iron fields. The number "**42**" signified that the Menominee Range Railway branch junction began 42 miles east of **Menominee, Michigan**.

"**Racketty**" Clark apparently ran a hotel at "**42**" when he wrote letters to *The Escanaba Tribune* (later *The Iron Port*) from that point. Racketty's letters became a featured weekly column titled "**Our Correspondence from the Menominee Range Railway**" which documented the railway's progress between **May 12, 1877** and **November 3, 1877**. In **mid-August**,

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1880, a “Range Item” entry identified the writer’s surname, as by then **Racketty Clark** was working in **Quinnesec’s** *The Menominee Range* newspaper office under Editor **William J. Penberthy**.

Wolverine’s first letter, dated **Breiting Mine** [later the **Vulcan Mine**], **June 1, 1877**, was published in the **June 9, 1877** edition of *The Mining Journal*. **Wolverine’s** actual identity has not yet been determined.

These contemporary accounts provide some of the most interesting, detailed and significant documentation of the early development of the Menominee Iron Range and provide a flavor of the life and times of those involved.

The initial issue of *The Menominee Range*, the first newspaper published on the Menominee Iron Range in **Quinnesec, Menominee County, Michigan**, appeared **March 19, 1879** with **William J. Penberthy** as editor and **John Lane Buell**, the founder of Quinnesec, as publisher.

Many years ago **John Alquist**, a diligent, native Quinnesec historian, was researching at the **Spies Public Library** in **Menominee, Michigan**, when he noticed this first issue of *The Menominee Range* under the glass covering a table. He inquired about the newspaper, resulting in the library donating this historic document to the **Dickinson County Library**. This issue has been completely transcribed and is available on the research computer in the Dickinson County Library.

Carl L. Wendel, who platted **Norway, Menominee County, Michigan**, purchased *The Menominee Range* from Penberthy in the **spring of 1881** and moved the paper to **Norway**.

On **July 1, 1882**, **Wendel**, who was preoccupied with his iron mining interests, sold the newspaper to **Henry S. Swift**, who moved the newspaper to **Iron Mountain,**

Menominee County, Michigan. In **1883**, **Robert P. Tuten** joined **Swift**. On **January 1, 1884**, **Tuten** bought a half-interest in the newspaper, and then on **August 13, 1884**, bought out **Swift’s** interest entirely.

On **May 21, 1891**, *The Menominee Range* became *The Iron Range*, when **Dickinson County** was formed. **Publisher Tuten** wanted to remove Menominee from the masthead to disassociate with Menominee County. The newspaper continued to be published as *The Iron Range* through **October 27, 1892**, when the name was again changed to *The Range-Tribune*. The last microfilmed edition dates to **April 30, 1898**.

Tuten also established *The Daily Tribune*, a 4-page newspaper which began **July 6, 1896**, and was published through **July 3, 1899**.

Unfortunately, the bound volumes for the first ten years of *The Menominee Range* are missing. The Dickinson County Library’s collection begins with Volume XI (**March 28, 1889**).

Fortunately, another outstanding find was made in the columns of *The Mining Journal* when *The Menominee Ranger*, a newspaper within a newspaper, was discovered.

As the **Menominee River Railroad** was being constructed, **Peter J. Bennett** used the pseudonym “**Bowlders**” and wrote many columns published in *The Mining News* under that name.

On **March 29, 1879**, **Bennett** began publishing *The Menominee Ranger*, not to be confused with **Quinnesec’s** *The Menominee Range*, on pages leased from *The Mining Journal* which were “devoted exclusively to the news and advocacy of the interests of the Menominee Range, including **Escanaba** and **Menominee**.”

The Menominee Ranger, published from **March 29, 1879** through **August 14,**

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1880, contained regular columns devoted to the developing settlements along the **Menominee Iron Range**, providing contemporary news from **Waucedah, Vulcan, Norway, Quinnesec, Iron Mountain, and Commonwealth and Florence, Wisconsin**, as they were established.

The Quinnesec Reporter followed *The Menominee Range*, beginning publication in **January, 1882**. **Henry S. Swift**, the publisher and editor, purchased *The Menominee Range* from **Carl L. Wendel** on **July 1, 1882**, and moved that newspaper from **Norway to Iron Mountain**. *The Quinnesec Reporter* was discontinued by **September 30, 1882**. No issues have been found.

The Dickinson County Herald, also called *The Quinnesec Herald*, was first published by **James Fitzgibbons** and **Ted McKenna** on **February 9, 1897**. Fitzgibbons withdrew from *The Quinnesec Herald* by **June 3, 1897**. No issues have been found.

The Norway Iron Chronicle first appeared in **Norway, Menominee County, Michigan**, on **August 28, 1880**, with **Bennett & Shabel**, publishers. **Peter J. Bennett** had just finished publishing *The Menominee Ranger* on **August 14, 1880**.

By **July 1, 1882**, **Bennett** had a new partner, **John “Jack” McCarthy**. A month later, in **August, 1882**, **Bennett** sold his interest to **Mr. Cooney**, and the partnership became **McCarthy & Cooney**. By **May 19, 1883**, **McCarthy** was the sole owner and proprietor of *The Norway Iron Chronicle*. Only three issues have been found and are microfilmed: **August 28, 1880; July 28, 1883; and December 23, 1883**.

On **February 7, 1885**, the first edition of *The Current*, published by **A.C. Cook**, appeared on the streets of **Norway, Menominee County, Michigan**. **J.B.**

Knight, who had ably managed the paper for year and a half for **Cook** and who continued the publication until his death in **1926**, purchased *The Current* in **September, 1886**. **Charles Tesseyman**, **Knight’s son-in-law**, served as manager and editor following **Knight’s death**.

The Current contains wonderful contemporary accounts, and is especially useful in researching mining news, as **Knight** was detailed and complete in his coverage.

The Florence Mining News, the earliest surviving newspaper from the **Menominee Range**, commenced publication **January 1, 1881**, when **Florence** was still a part of **Marquette County, Wisconsin**. **Claude M. Atkinson** was the first editor. On **May 5, 1883**, **Atkinson** sold the newspaper to **Chase S. Osborn** and **James I. Toner**. **Osborn** purchased **Toner’s interest** a year or two later.

On **April 9, 1887**, **Osborn** sold the newspaper to **Henry C. Campbell** and **George C. Youngs**. On **August 1, 1888**, **Campbell & Youngs** dissolved their partnership, and **Fred M. Youngs** purchased **Campbell’s interest** in the newspaper, forming the **Youngs Bros.**

This newspaper is also an outstanding resource for mining news, and documented the extension of the railroad into **Iron County (then Marquette County), Michigan**, and the early development of settlements therein.

Chase S. Osborn became editor of *The Sault News* in **Sault Ste. Marie, Chippewa County, Michigan**, and was elected as **Michigan’s 27th governor**, serving from **1911 to 1913**.

Both **Marquette’s *The Mining Journal*** and *The Florence Mining News* contained accounts of the **Chapin and Ludington miners’ strike** in five-year-old **Iron**

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Mountain in **November, 1884**. The stacked headline on a handbill attached to the **November 24, 1884** edition of *The Florence Mining News* read:

“Chapin and Ludington Miners Go Out on Thursday Afternoon to the Number of Over 1,000 – Differences in Time the Cause – Supt. Cady’s Life Threatened and Supt. Stockbridge Beaten and Driven Out of Town. – Threatening to Stop the Pumps and Burn the Buildings. – A WILD MOB.”

Personally, the most exciting article found involved my great-great-grandfather, **Albert G. Cummings**, a pioneer **Iron River** resident. He was **wounded in a shooting on Genesee Street** in front of his restaurant on Monday, **February 23, 1891**. The detailed story appeared in the **February 28, 1891** edition of *The Florence Mining News* under the stacked headline: “A MURDEROUS POLACK. – JOS. HOLAS, INSANE WITH RAGE, SHOOTS TO KILL AT IRON RIVER. – He Fires two Charges of buckshot Into a Large Crowd of People – He Shoots High, but Seriously Wounds Two Men – He Fires a Third Time, Probably Fatally Wounding Marshal Scott and Injuring Al. Cummings, who were Trying to Arrest Him – The Fiend Finally Secured – A Lynching Bee Barely Averted. – The Would-Be Assassin Run Out of the County in Order to Save His Precious Neck – Full Particulars on the Exciting Occurrence.” This serendipitous find provided an astounding bit of unrecorded family history.

The Diamond Drill began publication in **Crystal Falls, Iron County, Michigan, January 22, 1887**. **Claude M. Atkinson** was the publisher. The greatest find for the **Iron Mountain** area encountered in this newspaper was an account of the grand opening of the **Commercial Hotel** (later known as the **Milliman Hotel**, the **Dickinson Hotel** and the **Dickinson Inn**)

on Tuesday, **January 17, 1888**. The detailed account filled three full columns on the front page and four full columns of the back page of the **January 21, 1888** edition of *The Diamond Drill*.

The stacked headline read: “A GRAND AFFAIR. – THE MOST BRILLIANT EVENT OF THE SEASON. – The Opening Ball of the Commercial Hotel a Phenomenal Event of Pleasure. – A Good Account of the Reception – The Address – Programme – Menu – Committees – Guests – Minute Description of the Hotel and Furnishings – In the Basement – An Interesting Chapter Relative to Hotels. – Biographical Sketches. – Notes of Interest.”

The Mining Reporter, founded by **Edward P. Lott**, a local attorney, published its first issue in **Iron River, Iron County, Michigan, August 29, 1885**. In **1887** Lott sold the newspaper to **Pat O’Brien**, who changed the name to the *Iron County Reporter*, and shortly thereafter to the *Iron River and Stambaugh Reporter*.

From **1887** to **1921** the newspaper operated as a weekly publication. It was a daily newspaper briefly, with **George Breen** serving as advertising manager. When daily operation was suspended the newspaper appeared on Tuesday and Friday, and later changed publication dates to Monday and Thursday.

Publisher **Pat O’Brien** died in **1933**, but ownership remained in the family with **Mauritz E. Carlson**, husband of **Dorothy (O’Brien) Carlson**, Pat’s daughter, in charge. **George Breen** served as both editor and manager and later was named general manager. **Eugene Moore** became editor. Breen retired in **1958** and Moore became both manager and editor until he resigned in **1962**.

Albert K. Silfven, who had been the news editor at the *Reporter* since **September, 1961**, became managing

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editor. **Carlson** sold both the newspaper and the Reporter Office Supply Store to **Northland Advertising, Inc.**, of **Ashland, Wisconsin**, **September 26, 1968**.

At some point in the mid-twentieth century the bound volumes were burned,

and few issues remain. Thus, Iron River and Stambaugh lost a significant amount of their contemporary history with the thoughtless destruction of these early newspapers.