

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 22: The Role of Newspapers in Documenting Early History – Part 2

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian



Mose Antonini (left), Forest Extrand (center) and Matthew H. Doney (right) were compositors, working in the composing room laying out pages of The Iron Mountain News in the early 1920's in preparation for printing. During much of the letterpress era, movable type was composed by hand for each page. Cast metal sorts were composed into words, then lines, then paragraphs, then pages of text and tightly bound together to make up a form, with all letter faces exactly the same "height to paper", creating an even surface of type. The form was placed in a press, inked, and an impression made on paper. During typesetting, individual sorts were picked from a type case with the right hand, and set into a composing stick held in the left hand from left to right, and as viewed by the setter upside down. Wooden printing sorts were in use for centuries in combination with metal type. Set width, like body size, was measured in points. The compositors held a composing stick and selected sorts or letters. They stood in front of two cases with the upper case containing capital letters and the lower case containing small letters, resulting in the terms "upper case" and "lower case" when referring to printed material. [Menominee Range Historical Museum]

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[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.]

Most late nineteenth and early twentieth century rural newspapers contained eight pages, occasionally expanded to twelve pages. Pages were printed two at a time, side by side, so the layout for local and regional news often appeared on pages 1 and 8 and 4 and 5. National and international news, as well as serialized fictional stories, came in by rail on plates which had spaces for advertising and often appeared on pages 2 and 3 and 6 and 7.

Stacked headlines were common in these early newspapers, as everything was set in single columns with the exception of some advertisements. Phrases using variations of upper and lower case letters and font sizes told the basic story in a stacked headline, followed by the article with additional details.

When local newspapers didn't exist or have disappeared, researching early newspapers from the surrounding areas often provide information. Dickinson County was particularly well-covered in the early Escanaba newspapers, as our iron ore went by rail to that city from which it was shipped to the steel mills on the lower Great Lakes.

In most rural areas early editors participated in exchanges, sending their weekly newspapers to surrounding communities. Editors ran news items gleaned from these exchanges regularly – although a week late – and some established regular columns with news from nearby settlements.

When reading “Menominee Range Memories,” note how many items quoted

come from neighboring communities, especially in the 1880's.

The following items, all gleaned from newspapers copying reports for other exchanges, provide the Menominee Iron Range area with some important historical tidbits.

From the **August 9, 1879** edition of Escanaba's *The Iron Port*, excerpted from Marquette's *The Menominee Ranger*:

VULCAN – A number of Indians – men, women and children – came into town Wednesday last from Bad Water [sic – Badwater] for the purpose of selling berries, furs, etc., having with them a lot of regular Indian ponies. They make a novel picture as they go along one after the other, looking more like Indians we read about than those usually seen in civilization, and are always looked upon in wonderment by strangers, though it has long since lost its novelty to the residents here. –The Menominee Ranger

The following article under “Range Items” exhibits how exchanges passed news from one newspaper to another. Originally appearing in Norway's *The [Iron] Chronicle* on **July 31, 1880**, the following was published in *The Menominee Ranger* in the **August 7, 1880** edition of Marquette's *The Mining Journal*:

Highwaymen, near Iron Mountain City, on Thursday night last, attacked George Donaldson and beat and kicked him in an unsuccessful attempt to rob him. They then attacked Matt. Murray, breaking his arm and stealing his watch and pocketbook containing \$50. The robbers are still at large.

From the **May 14, 1881** edition of Escanaba's *The Iron Port*, as excerpted from the **May 7, 1881** edition of Norway's *The Iron Chronicle*:

Felch will run a tri-weekly stage from Norway to Felch mountain [sic – Mountain],

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leaving on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, at 9:45 a.m. –The Iron Chronicle, 7th.

From the **April 11, 1885** edition of Escanaba's *The Iron Port*, excerpted from Iron Mountain's *The Menominee Range*:

K.S. Buck shot at a lynx from his seat in a cutter. The shot scared his horse and in pulling on the lines he discharged his pistol (self-cocking) and killed the horse. –Range.

Correspondents from surrounding communities provided information published in special columns, many on a weekly basis. Many of these columns exhibit alliteration in their identification. Area examples of such columns include: Chips from **Channing**, Facts from **Felch**, Facts from **Floodwood**, **Foster City** Nuggets, **Granite Bluff** Gossip, **Loretto** Laconics, **Metropolitan** Mention, **Monroe Mine** Minutes, Newsy Notes from **Niagara**, **Norway** Notations, **Quinnesec** Quotum, Notes from **Ralph**, **Randville** Reports, News Gossip from **Sagola**, **Sturgeon Mill** Mention, **Vulcan** Varieties and **Waucedah** Whispers.

A similar threat, apparently written by an unidentified correspondent calling himself Jumbo, appeared in the "**Waucedah Whisperings**" column in the **October 24, 1885** edition of **Norway's** *The Current*:

On Sunday last our peaceful village was aroused by a couple of women whose tongues would wake the dead. We will withhold their names this time, but if the same scene occurs again on the public streets, they will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law and their names given to the public whom they daily honor (?) with their presence. JUMBO

The following item was published in the "**Quinnesec Quotum**" column in the **November 14, 1885** edition of **Norway's** *The Current*.

Twenty-five Indians in town this week and not a scalp missing.

Columns from smaller settlements nearby were common, as is this example, taken from the "**Quinnesec Quotum**" column in the **January 2, 1886** edition of **Norway's** *The Current*.

Three stores, five saloons, two meat markets in town, so we have lots to eat, and something to drink.

The temperance society is doing a good business, and so are the saloon keepers.

From the "**News Gossip from Sagola**" column in the **December 8, 1904** edition of the *Iron Mountain Press*:

The total weight of venison shipped from this station by freight and express during the hunting season was 17,500 pounds.

Topics found in early newspapers don't differ tremendously from those appearing in today's newspapers. The most apparent difference, however, is that editorial comment is frequently interspersed in the news columns. Editors did not hesitate to make their opinion known when covering a story, obviously unconcerned about libel suits in a much less litigious society that today.

Recognizing a responsibility to positively shape their community's social ideals and morals, the press frequently admonished residents exhibiting unacceptable behavior, long before e-mail, texting and Twitter.

The following examples provide today's citizens with insight into the social mores of local communities.

In the **October 1, 1887** edition of **Norway's** *The Current*, the editor warned pretty thieves of potential consequences, as follows:

The habit of stealing whips, lap robes and other articles from carriages left standing on the street, is becoming epidemic, and some one [sic – someone]

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will have to take a bad dose of medicine if it continues.

The following item from the **May 30, 1889** edition of *The Menominee Range* exemplifies an editor using his “power” to correct an unacceptable social situation:

A MAN residing on Fleshiem street is making himself obnoxious to his neighbors by beating his wife. His name will be published if he continues his cruel conduct.

The editor of *The Menominee Range* didn’t hesitate to admonish teenager boys or their parents in a desire to conform to the community’s social mores and assisted the police in the **June 20, 1889** edition, as follows:

“Some fond parents here will have an opportunity of bailing their sons out of the lock-up, and paying fines one of these days,” said one of our police officers a few days ago, “if this thing of loafing around street corners and entrances to public places and insulting girls and ladies isn’t stopped pretty quick. Several disgusting incidents have been noticed lately, and I will pull a gang of the hoodlums some night.” A word to the wise is sufficient.”

The following shocking article regarding public nudity appeared in the **June 16, 1892** edition of *Iron Mountain’s The Iron Range* under the headline “**Should Be Stopped**”:

Crystal lake [sic – Lake] is becoming quite a popular resort summer evenings and Sundays for promenades by ladies and gentlemen, driving, etc., and it would be still more popular but for the crowds of boys who go down there bathing. It is not pleasant for a lady and gentleman who may be walking or driving along the Crystal lake [Lake] boulevard to meet a crowd of boys from 12 to 20 years [old] capering about perfectly naked, neither is it decent for the boys nor creditable for the city officials that such things are allowed to occur. A public

natatorium properly constructed and properly conducted at this point would be no doubt a public luxury, but decency demands that boys and young men should not be permitted to expose themselves in so public a place.

The following item from the **August 4, 1888** edition of *Norway’s The Current* provides some amazing medical advice:

Spotted Horse, the one and only Indian doctor, continues to wear buckskin and perscribe [sic – prescribe] for the ills, fancied and otherwise, of the Norway people.

Patriotic pride exhibited by immigrants was praised by the editor in the **September 9, 1915** edition of the *Iron Mountain Press* under the headline “**Salute the Flag**”:

It is a fact worthy of note that, on a legal holiday, when there is a parade and the national banner is flying at the corner of Stephenson avenue and Ludington street, the paraders salute the flag. This was particularly noticeable last Monday during the parade of the Scandinavian societies and the Eagles. The salute was almost unanimous. And, too, the paraders were nearly all foreign born. It is an occurrence witnessed in few cities.

Amazing feats worthy of note often appeared in newspaper columns, as this item from the **July 14, 1892** edition of *Iron Mountain’s The Iron Range*:

TALK about rapid driving, J.W. Molloy, the livery man at Florence, Wis., drove to Iron Mountain, Mich., on Monday, in one hour and fifteen minutes. The distance is thirteen miles by rail and about fifteen miles by wagon road. Jack says he doesn’t allow any one [sic – anyone] to throw dust in his face.

Humor was also an important element in the newspaper columns. Whether an actual occurrence or a reformatting of an old vaudeville joke, the following item

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published in the **May 30, 1889** edition of Iron Mountain's *The Menominee Range*, under the headline "**The City**," still elicits at least a smile on the face of the reader:

WHAT funny ideas some people have. The other day a lady was talking to the mayor about the fire department, the steam fire engine, how much water it would throw, etc., when she said, "I shouldn't think it would be necessary to boil the water before it is thrown on the fire, why wouldn't cold water do just as well?" The mayor had a good laugh and then explained to her the use of the boiler.