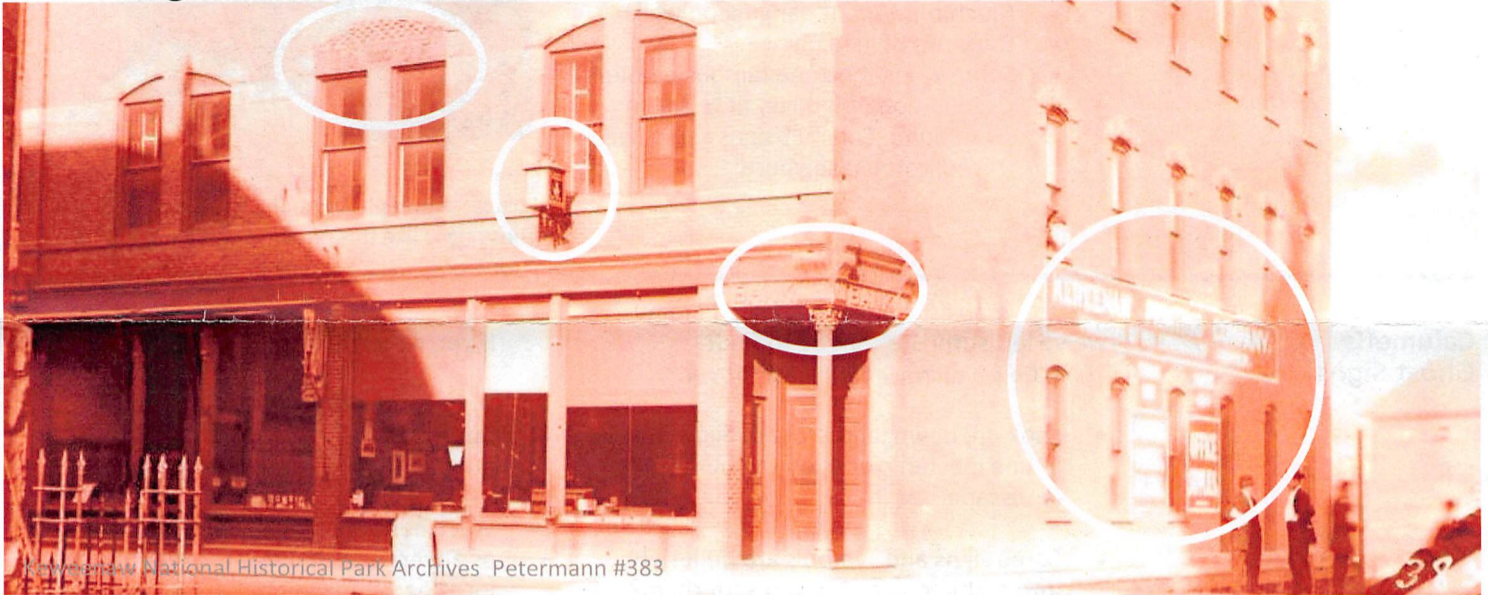




## Ghost Signs of Downtown Calumet



Keweenaw National Historical Park Archives Petermann #383

**Ghost signs are faded messages from the past. Can you spot them?**

Signs are all around us. They point, identify, direct. They reflect individual tastes, personality, public health concerns, and national advertising campaigns. Old signs bring colorful details of everyday life in the past to today's streetscape. Some signs, like those painted on walls many years ago and now faded, are called "Ghost Signs."

Use this guide to search downtown Calumet, formerly known as the Village of Red Jacket, for the ghosts of signs, advertising and symbols.

### Signs

Painted signs on buildings were most popular from 1890-1960

- Replaced by neon signs
- Banned by ordinances nationwide
- Most common on wood, brick
  - » Find an exception in Calumet!

Signs and symbols represent:

- Local businesses
- National brands
- Organizations & Religions
- Public health concerns
- Roadways
- Communities
- Art & more

### Symbols

Architectural Signs

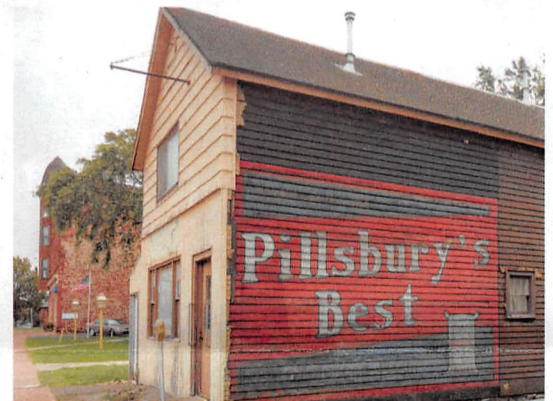
- Carved in stone
- Cast in Terra Cotta or iron
- Welded to buildings
- Pressed in Concrete
- Laid in tile

### Layers of History

Ghost signs are exposed when:

- They were left alone
- Covered by siding later removed
- Painted over, but paint is fading
- A neighboring building is demolished or changed

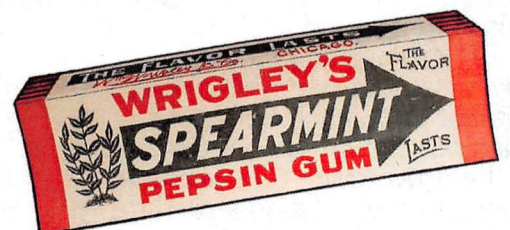
Many buildings were painted with multiple signs over the years, the new on top of the old. As the newer signs fade, you can sometimes see hints of an older sign revealed beneath it. Check the Pillsbury's Best sign near 6<sup>th</sup> and Portland Streets for a good view of these layers of history.



The Pillsbury sign now at Jim's Pizza was uncovered during demolition of a neighboring building in 2016.

### National Brands, Household Names

Early nationwide advertising campaigns saw the Keweenaw as profitable ground, resulting in active competition between national brands of flour and other products. Three Pillsbury's signs remain to suggest they may have outnumbered Gold Medal, General Mills, and Duluth Universal ads in the community. Betty Crocker™ and the Pillsbury Dough Boy™ are among the long-lasting results of these campaigns.



A pack of Wrigley's Spearmint Gum is painted beneath a Pillsbury's Best Flour ad in downtown Calumet.

## Who Painted the Signs?

Local store signs were usually by local painters

- Most area towns had paint shops.

National ad signs usually by "Wall Dogs"

- Professional, traveling painters
- Much time spent hanging on walls.
- Daily use of lead paint
- Some would become famous painters
- Used national signage, fit to space
  - » Some Calumet signs can be seen replicated elsewhere!



Postcards and photographs help us to "see" some ghost signs like this one on Oak St. near 5<sup>th</sup> St.

## Exploring Calumet's Ghost Signs

Use this map as a guide, but keep in mind we've left surprises for you to find!

\*Hint: Go a bit farther north on 6<sup>th</sup> Street.\*

- Look up, down, and around. Signs may be in unexpected places on the built landscape.
- Some signs and symbols are built right into architecture. Can you spot them?
- Some signs and symbols are easier to see if you're across the street or step back.
- Does re-creating old signs count as preservation? What other preservation questions can we ask about ghost signs?
- Were certain of locations more valuable as advertising real estate? What types of locations, and why?

## Ghost Sign Map

This map contains many details about a small part of Calumet in 1917.

Icons have been added to show some good places to look for different Ghost Signs of the past! A convenient place to start is by parking in the visitors lot beside the Calumet Visitor Center, indicated with a star. The Visitor Center, formerly a commercial building and lodge hall known as the Union Building, is featured as the header image for this bulletin. Its Ghost Signs provide an opportunity to train your eyes before you set out downtown!

### Map Legend:

- Wood Frame Construction
- Brick Construction
- Stone Construction

### Bonus activity:

This map is based upon Calumet in 1917, while painted advertisements were near their peak of popularity. Some of the buildings shown no longer stand in the downtown. Can you find signs of these missing structures in the form of foundations or outlines on neighboring buildings?

