

Munising Michigan

A Brief History

Michigan's Upper Peninsula town of Munising was named for the Ojibwa Indian words "Kitchi Minissing" which means "place of the island." People have lived on Grand Island and nearby Munising Bay for at least 3200 years as evidenced by a copper knife blade flecked with silver, found several years ago on the east shore of the bay. Other sites on Grand Island, Miners and Chapel



Hiawatha sculpture in Post Office

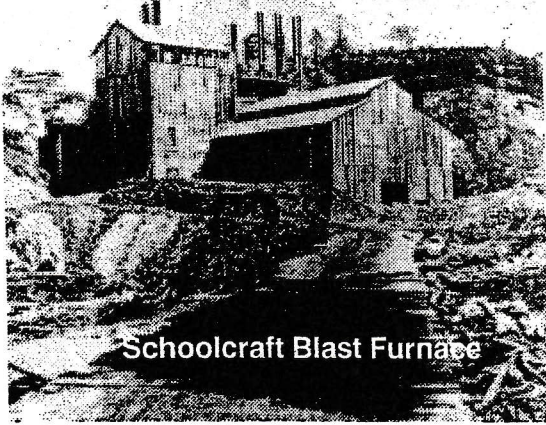
Beaches corroborate these early settlement patterns of some 5,000 years ago. These archaic people were hunter-gatherers, fishing along the shoreline and picking berries in spring, summer and fall. They moved inland during the area's blustery winters with some 500cm + of snowfall. The Ojibwa moved into this region in the early 1600's after being driven west by warring eastern tribes. For the past 400 years, their heritage has been one of close ties to the earth and the natural cycle of the seasons.

Early explorers to what is now known as Munising included Fathers Jacques Marquette and Frederick Baraga, who traveled Lake Superior in the 1660s and 1700's. It is told that Marquette said Mass for the Ojibwa atop Miners Castle. A hundred years later, mineral prospectors hired by English explorer Alexander Henry stopped by what is now the Miners River, just east of Munising. Though no minerals of value were located, the name Miners remains as a testament to their passing. Indian agent and author Henry Rowe Schoolcraft made his way along Superior's south shore several times. In 1821 he documented one journey to Minnesota and mentioned the Pictured Rocks cliffs, the Grand Sable Dunes, and numerous other sites along this stretch of rugged shoreline. In 1855, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned the epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* using Schoolcraft's research. Several other explorers over the years have left diaries of their passing through this area.

Early white settlers to the area included Abraham Williams, who founded a fur trading post on Grand Island in 1840. Other later efforts to settle Munising Bay included a large platted development that was called Grand Island City in 1850 which never materialized. With the discovery of iron ore in Marquette to the west in 1844, and the opening of the locks at Sault Ste. Marie in 1855, commerce and travel on Lake Superior boomed. Shipping tonnage on the big lake soared as lighthouses and life saving stations were built to help protect ships, crews and cargo alike.

After the close of America's Civil War in 1865 a blast furnace to produce pig iron was



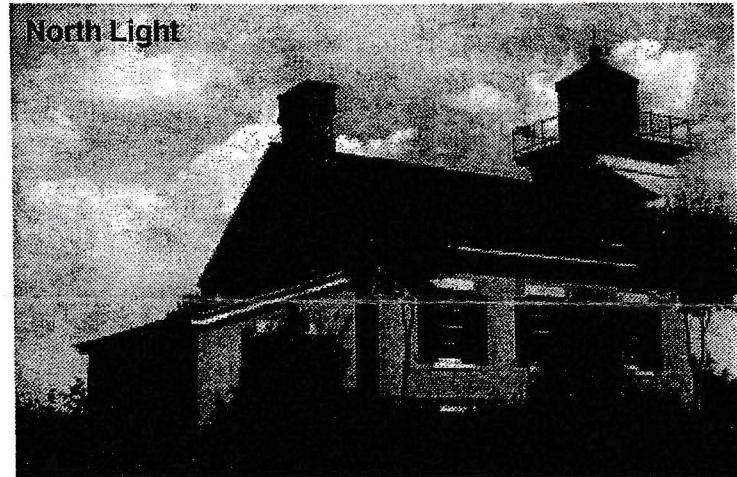


Schoolcraft Blast Furnace

established in 1867 near the historic center of Munising on the eastern shore of the bay. The furnace was viable for only nine years. About the same time, another blast furnace operated west of Munising at Bay Furnace and was located on the site of the old Ojibwa settlement. Munising Lighthouses include the East Channel Light, constructed in 1867, the North Light in 1855 and the Munising Range Lights in 1908. Prior to invasion of the exotic sea lamprey, commercial and sport fishing were significant industries in

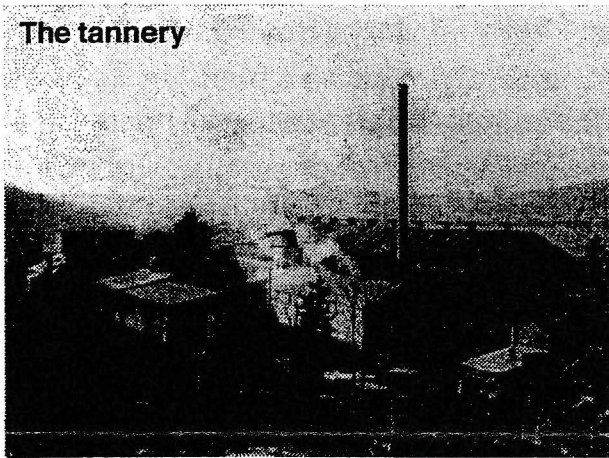
Munising.

Munising is the county seat of Alger County which was incorporated in 1885. The railroad had arrived several years prior, and during the turn of the century, logging and timber were the primary industries. Also in late 1800's and early 1900's, the "world's largest leather company" is said to have operated on the east shore of Munising Bay. Raw hides were shipped here by boat from South America. In 1904, the Munising paper mill was constructed and is still in operation at the south end of the bay.



North Light

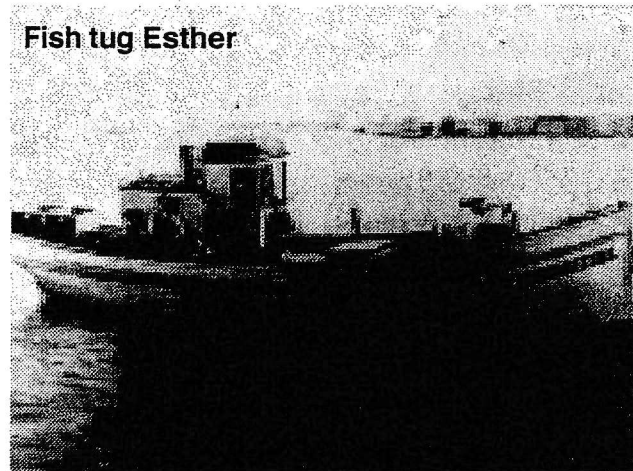
Other industries once known to Munising include the Jackson-Tindle lumber mill (watch for pilings west of the city dock) the Atlas Plywood Co. and the Munising Woodenware Mfg. Co. . Munising woodenware bowls, tables, chairs, clothespins, and rolling pins are valued as collectibles today.



The tannery

Munising is a small community of some 3,200 residents. Tourism (both winter and summer) in the Hiawatha National Forest, Lake Superior State Forest, and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, two State of Michigan prisons, the Hiawatha Log Homes

Inc., Timber Products of Michigan, and other service oriented industries call Munising home. We hope your brief stay in our fair town is an enjoyable one!



Fish tug Esther



Gregg L. Bruff
Heritage Education Program Manager
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore
National Park Service