

Help Preserve Keweenaw's Proud Heritage

Founded in 1980, the Keweenaw County Historical Society depends on the generous contributions of members and friends to fund its continuing preservation, restoration and exhibition work.

The members of the Society have a deep respect for those who went before and those who created the history we study and preserve. And we have a profound responsibility to those who will come after, to ensure that the history is still retained. We are the connecting link, and it is important that we do our job well. Every membership and every gift is vital — we could not continue the Society's important and exciting work without such support.

Please join us! Members of the Society receive our award-winning quarterly newsletter, *The Superior Signal*, and other benefits.

To join, or ask for additional information about membership, or assist our work with a donation, please use the form on this brochure. Detach or make a copy of it and mail it to the Society today. Your involvement will be very much appreciated.

www.keweenawhistory.org



We invite you to join the Keweenaw County Historical Society

Yes, I am interested in assisting the work of the Society

Please sign me up as a member. My first year dues are enclosed.

- Historian.....\$30 per year
- Copper Miner.....\$50 per year
- Lightkeeper....\$75 or more per year
- Life\$500

Please mail me additional information about Society membership.

I'm not interested in membership, but want to help. My \$_____ donation is enclosed.

I wish to volunteer, please contact me.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

Please detach or make a copy

and mail to:

KEEWEENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
670 LIGHTHOUSE ROAD
EAGLE HARBOR, MICHIGAN 49950



Thank You!

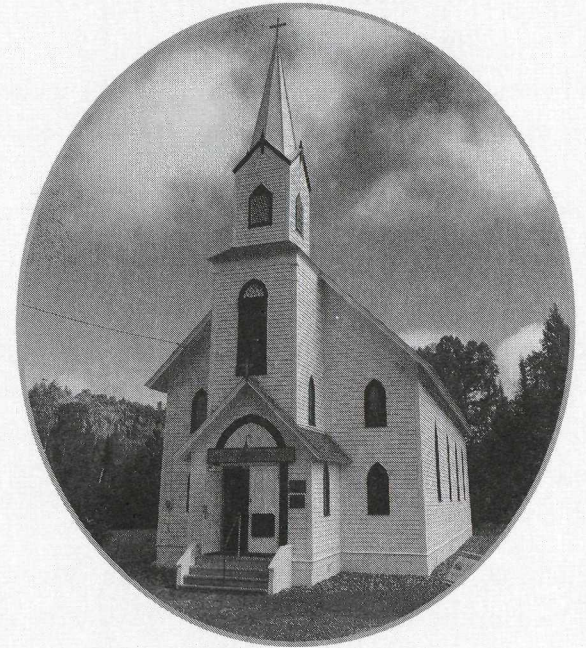
Church of the Assumption BVM

Phoenix, Michigan — 1899

Originally in Clifton, Michigan as

St. Mary's Church

1858-1899



Keweenaw County Historical Society

Eagle Harbor, Michigan

The Phoenix Church Museum is open early-June to early October.

From 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Keweenaw Heritage Site

Partner of Keweenaw National Historical Park



The historic Phoenix Church on U.S. 41, was originally in the township of Clifton near the famous Cliff Mine and adjacent to the Catholic Cemetery. (A foot path to this cemetery is accessible off U.S. 41 between the snow gauge and the junction with Cliff Drive).

With a population of more than 1,400, Clifton's Catholics from Ireland, Germany and Canada sought religious instruction and services.

Fr. (later Bishop) Frederick Baraga visited the Keweenaw in the 1840s, traveling in the winter on snowshoes from his headquarters in Assinins near present-day Baraga. In the absence of a church at Clifton, he said mass at the home of John Kerry in nearby Eagle River.

Fr. Baraga came to the Keweenaw twice a year until October 1854 when he ordained Rev. Henry L. Thiele and assigned him to Eagle Harbor. Traveling from Eagle River, Fr. Thiele said Mass every third Sunday of each month in a school house in Clifton.

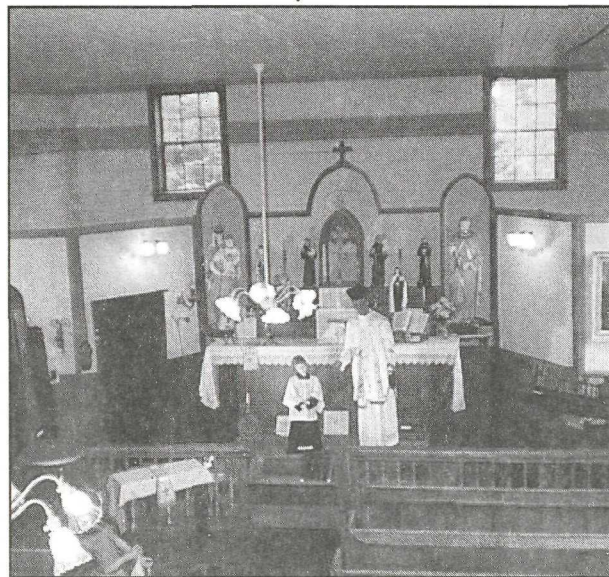
In 1858, the Pittsburgh and Boston Mining Company, operators of the Cliff Mine, donated an acre of land and financial support to the resident's campaign to build a church. Nicholas Gasser, who a year earlier had built the Holy Redeemer Church in Eagle Harbor, was hired to build the Clifton church using the same plans for the sum of \$1,860. A small log cabin-type structure was built nearby for the itinerant priest as well as a cemetery. The first services in St. Mary's church by Fr. Thiele are believed to have been held in 1858.

As copper prices declined and production costs increased the mine was closed in June of 1870. By 1900 Clifton was becoming a ghost town.

Church officials decided to move the church to the mining community of Phoenix in 1898-1899. The church was cut in half and moved by horse and wagon to Phoenix and reconstructed on land provided by the Phoenix Consolidated Copper Company. The steeple was removed from the roof of the building and placed on top of the newly added vestibule. On October 9, 1899, Rev. Alexander Smietana (or Smietna) became the pastor and began regular services in the church renamed "Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary".

In 1933, services were held commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the church's founding. In the early 1950's with a declining population, Masses became periodic. It is estimated that the last services were held in 1957.

The Keweenaw County Historical Society recognized the importance of this historic church and obtained the property from the Marquette Diocese and took over the preservation and maintenance of the property. With the welcome assistance of community groups such as the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Navy Reserve Seabees, the Tri-



County Corrections Department, the Camp Kitwin State Department of Corrections, various grants and generous donations by individuals, the Society began and now continues the ongoing work of restoration. Volunteers hung the church's bell obtained from the demolished Catholic Church at Gay.

As a historic site and museum, the Church of the Assumption BVM, commonly referred to as the Phoenix Church, now appears much as it did when folks from another century knelt in prayer. It contains at least two artifacts from every Catholic Church in Keweenaw and Houghton Counties, past and present, as well as artifacts from other denominations. Although now deconsecrated, the church is still used for weddings, baptisms, memorial services, annual blessing of the animals, annual Catholic Mass and educational and historic presentations. Each Christmas season lights are placed in the church windows and on the surrounding trees.

On March 15, 2000, the U.S. Department of Interior placed this structure on the National Register of Historic Places.

