

Gay Schoolhouse Historical Museum

Gay Location, Michigan



Keweenaw County Historical Society

Eagle Harbor, Michigan

The Gay Schoolhouse Museum is
open Wednesday and Saturday
June through September
Noon - 3:00 pm

Keweenaw Heritage Site

Partner of Keweenaw National Historical Park



Help Preserve Keweenaw's Proud Heritage

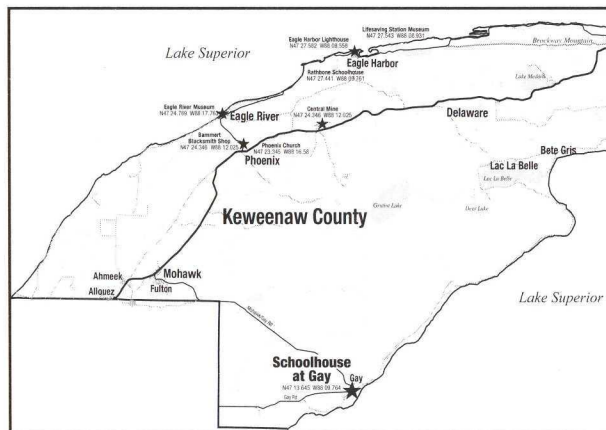
Founded in 1980, the Keweenaw County Historical Society depends on the generous contributions of members and friends to fund its continuing preservation, restoration and exhibition work.

The members of the Society have profound respect for those who went before, 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 there. 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 copy

and mail to:

Keweenaw County Historical Society
670 LIGHTHOUSE ROAD
MOHAWK, MICHIGAN 49950
www.keweenawhistory.org

Thank You!

Gay Schoolhouse Historical Museum

A Part of Local History

A few workers from Hebbard Lumber and Stone Company established a small lumbering community in the early 1880s. Nestled into the protected east shore of Keweenaw Peninsula, its population remained low, and by 1898, the settlement nearly faded into history, as local lumber milling diminished. However, instead of abandonment, the character of the settlement changed.

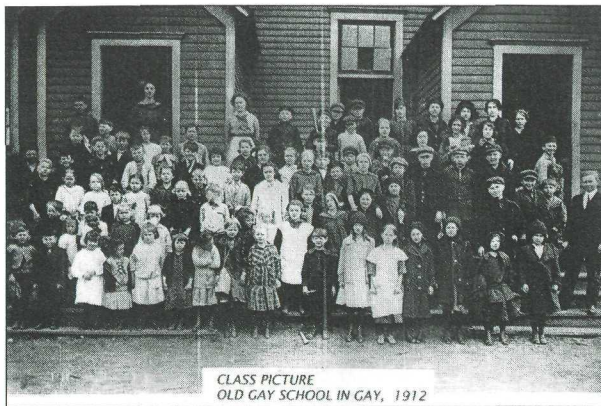
Mohawk Mining Company decided to locate a copper-ore stamping mill at this ideal location. The site had a nearby railroad and dock that could transport resources to and from the site. By 1901, the mining company began building a stamp mill and other support structures, as well as the first houses for employees and their families.

With the influx of families to this remote location, the mining company realized the need for a school. It constructed a frame building in 1902 to house a school on the ground level and a meeting hall on the second level. The schoolhouse served the community well until the 1920s, when it became overcrowded.

The community neared its peak of prosperity in 1906 with 1,500 people, 117 houses, the schoolhouse, businesses, and churches to serve the population associated with two stamp mills. Once a small settlement, the bustling twentieth-century town took the surname of the Mohawk Mining and Wolverine Copper Mining Companies' president, Joseph E. Gay, and that name has persisted to the present.

The Rise and Demise of a Schoolhouse

The original building with its two entrances and large staircase had new hardwood floors and a ventilation system installed in 1921. It also boasted indoor plumbing, electricity, and an outdoor play yard. These amenities made the Gay Schoolhouse one of the best in the region, but overcrowding remained a problem.



Historical photo of schoolhouse and students, before extensive renovation.

The companies studied the prospects of building a new schoolhouse, but determined that they could expand the current building economically. They built a two-story addition to the existing structure in 1927 to create the building as you see it today. The schoolhouse contained six classrooms to accommodate 250 pupils between first and tenth grades.

When the copper mills closed in 1932, families moved away from Gay. By 1959, only 25 children remained in eight grades within one classroom. Finally, the school closed in 1961. Some of the students from the last classes in this building still live in the area.

Eventually, a local business owner purchased the property with intention of repurposing it as a home and guest rooms. That owner stripped many of the original features of the well-appointed building before relinquishing title to Sherman Township for back taxes in the 1980s.

Sherman Township had no use for the building, nor did it have funds to maintain the schoolhouse properly, and the structure became derelict. The township proposed demolition for safety reasons, but could not afford to undertake the task. Finally, the Keweenaw County Historical Society (KCHS), having long recognized the value of the building to the Keweenaw story, purchased the school and a portion of the schoolyard for \$10,000 in 2007. The township retained the rest of the schoolyard for a community park and picnic pavilion.

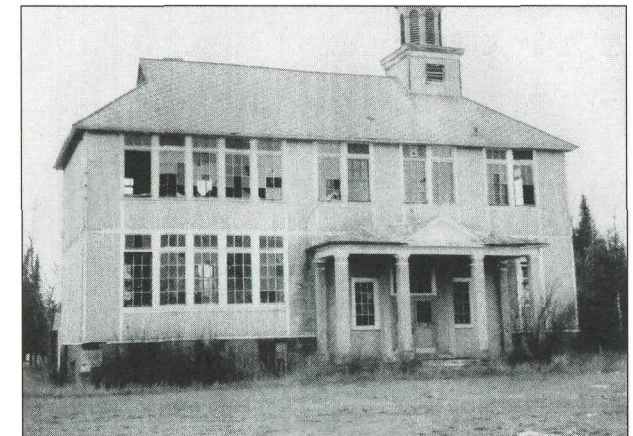
KCHS Gay Schoolhouse

The KCHS developed a seven-year restoration plan for the schoolhouse, and began repairing the roof and windows to stay further deterioration. The KCHS held its first MusicFest and silent auction in 2009 to generate funds earmarked for schoolhouse renovation. After completing several projects to make the building safe for visitors, KCHS held the official opening of the foyer and first floor classroom for visitors, during the third annual MusicFest.

Over the years, many people, who had acquired items and mementoes original to the schoolhouse, donated those items to KCHS for display. The KCHS purchased some classroom items locally and acquired others through donations.

Today, visitors enjoy an authentic classroom setting and a meeting/library space on the first floor, and the loom-room and a museum room with displays from the local Catholic church upstairs.

The loom-room suggests the story of the Gay Fire Department Auxiliary. Organized in 1971, the auxiliary made and sold rag rugs at its bazaar in support of the fire department and renovation of the historical Community Hall, located across the street. Several of these looms are in working order and once again contribute to supporting local historical renovation.



The schoolhouse remained empty for many years with windows broken and deteriorating roof. No one had the funds to restore this icon of historical Gay, Michigan.