

Chapter 2.0 Cultural Heritage and Community Events

2.1 Cultural Heritage

The City of Ishpeming is rich in heritage, destinations and recreation opportunities. Ishpeming's cultural heritage is a perfect example of the "melting pot" approach to community life exhibited throughout the United States. Early Ishpeming residents flocked to the area to work in the mines, bringing many unique personalities as well as their strong work ethics to the area.

The vast majority of settlers in the Ishpeming area were of European descent. For example, the 1870 Census reported a population of 6,103 residents, with 30% of residents being of Irish descent, 27% Cornish, and 18% of Swedish descent. In subsequent Census data, residents of Italian and Finnish heritage were strongly represented as well. Each group of immigrants brought their own special customs which have made Ishpeming the unique place it is today.

2.2 Famous Ishpeming Residents

- **Sam Cohodas**

Sam Cohodas was born in Poland in 1895 and emigrated to Marinette, WI in 1903. At the young age of 13, Mr. Cohodas and his brother became the Copper Country agents for their uncle's produce business; in 1915 the brothers started their own produce business in the Copper Country. Over the years, the brothers bought or merged with competitors and expanded their claim in the produce business.

In 1933, Sam Cohodas lead a community effort to reopen the Miner's First National Bank. This effort grew into a holding company that represented nine financial institutions in the Upper Peninsula. Over the years, Mr. Cohodas served on many boards of directors and was a member of many trade, service, civic and fraternal organizations.

- **Kelly Johnson**

Clarence (Kelly) Johnson and his team of workers called "Skunk Works" from Lockheed Aircraft Corporation in California designed more than 40 aircraft. Kelly Johnson was born to Swedish immigrants in Ishpeming in 1910. Mr. Johnson earned his Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Michigan in 1932 and his Master's Degree in aeronautical engineering in 1933. During the Great Depression, Mr. Johnson received a job offer from Lockheed Corporation in California. His team, "Skunk Works" produced the first combat-ready jet fighter. His team also developed the Constellation, which traveled quickly for great distances with room for 54 passengers, marking the first time people chose air travel over trains and boats.

Over the years Mr. Johnson and his “Skunk Works” team, developed over 40 aircraft and in 1958 earned the Collier Trophy for the greatest achievement in aviation. A top-secret project, the SR-71 Blackbird was a crowning career achievement and monitored trouble sports during the Vietnam War. In 1975, Mr. Johnson retired from Lockheed Martin. He received over forty awards and was honored by four presidents. Even after his death in 1990, his engineering philosophies continue to produce at Lockheed Martin.

- **Ted Mattson**

Ted Mattson was known as “Mr. Baseball” in Ishpeming. He was instrumental in the organization of the Junior County Baseball League as well as the Ishpeming City Baseball League, Upper Peninsula Semi-Pro League, Ishpeming Midget Baseball League, Babe Ruth League, and the American Legion Baseball Program.

Mr. Mattson served as the mayor of Ishpeming for five terms and was a city councilman for eight years. He also served as the president and vice-president of USWA Local 4950 before retiring from Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Company in 1972. Mr. Mattson was on the County Board of Commissioners from 1956 to 1972 and served as its chairman.

- **Robert Nelson**

Robert Nelson was born in Ohio in 1821 and came to the Ishpeming area in the late 1840s, where he would become the “father of Ishpeming.” Mr. Nelson provided supplies to early settlers and later moved the business to become one of the first buildings constructed in the downtown area. He also opened the Barnum House, the area’s first hotel, which after its destruction by fire, was rebuilt as the Nelson House, now the site of the Mather Inn. In the early 1870s, Nelson established and operated the Ishpeming Bank, later changing careers and opening the Hematite Mine, which he sold to the Cleveland Iron Mining Company. Mr. Nelson was also responsible for platting the City’s downtown, beginning in 1869 and left a lasting impression on the area.

- **Dr. Glen T. Seaborg**

Dr. Glen T. Seaborg, Nobel Laureate and chemist, was born on April 19, 1912 in Ishpeming. Dr. Seaborg began undergraduate studies at UCLA in 1929 and graduated in 1934 and moved on to graduate school at the University of California-Berkeley and received his Ph.D. in 1937. In 1941, Dr. Seaborg, along with several scientists, discovered plutonium-238, and later, plutonium-239m which would set the framework for the United States to create an atomic bomb, using plutonium. Seaborg would continue his scientific pursuits throughout the war and discovered 10 transuranium elements over the years.

In 1951, the King of Sweden awarded the Nobel Prize to Glen Seaborg and Edwin McMillan for their work in chemistry. The impact of Seaborg's scientific discoveries resulted in an advisory role with ten presidents, beginning with Franklin Roosevelt and was a tireless promoter of nuclear arms control. He served as chancellor at the University of California-Berkeley for three years and also served on many state and national committees in an effort to improve education.

In 1994, the American Chemical Society honored Glen Seaborg by naming element 106, *Seaborgium*. Northern Michigan University established the Glen T. Seaborg Center for Teaching Science and Mathematics in 1985. Groundbreaking for the new Glenn T. Seaborg Science Complex was held in 1998. Dr. Seaborg was the recipient of over 50 honorary degrees and has left a lasting influence in nuclear disarmament and education.

- **Dr. James F. Tobin Jr.**

Dr. James F. Tobin Jr. began practicing medicine in Marquette County in 1962 after moving to the Upper Peninsula from Queens, New York. Dr. Tobin was on staff at Bell Memorial Hospital maintaining a general surgery and family practice specializing in obstetrics and gynecology.

Dr. Tobin served on Ishpeming's City Council from 1983-1989 and from 1990 to 1998. Tobin also served as mayor from 1984-85, 1988, 1993-94 and 1997-98. In May 2001, Bell Memorial Hospital dedicated its medical center in honor of Dr. Tobin.

- **Ward L. Quaal**

Ward Quaal is an Ishpeming native and the retired president of WGN Continental Broadcasting Company, now known as the Tribune Broadcasting Company. Mr. Quaal was elected to the Hall of Fame of *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine in 1991. He holds five honorary degrees and a multitude of honors from educational and civic groups. In 2000, Mr. Quaal was one of one hundred men and women selected by *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine as most influential persons in broadcasting and cable in the twentieth century. In 2003, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences honored Quaal as an inaugural inductee into the Management Hall of Fame for his pioneering work in broadcast station management.

- **Frank Valente**

Frank Valente emigrated from Simbario, Italy to Ishpeming in 1934 at the age of 17. Even without the opportunity to obtain a formal education, Mr. Valente became a successful businessman and an influential politician. Mr. Valente owned several businesses throughout his career, the most famous being the restaurant he opened on Main Street in Ishpeming, the "Napoli."

Mr. Valente's career in politics began in 1955 when he was elected to the Ishpeming City Council. He served on the council until 1982, with a five year break from 1958 to 1963. He was the mayor of the City in 1970, 1971 and 1981 and served on the County Board of Commissioners from 1982 to 1988. Mr. Valente served on numerous boards and committees over the years and participated in several service organizations as well.

After his passing in 1988, the County Board of Commissioners, recognizing how diligently he worked to locate the Marquette County Medical Care Facility in Ishpeming, named the facility the Frank S. Valente Medical Facility in his honor.

- **John Voelker**

John Voelker was a lawyer, author and a Michigan Supreme Court Justice. Mr. Voelker graduated from Ishpeming High School in 1922 and from the University of Michigan in 1928. He was the Marquette County prosecutor from 1935-1950. Voelker was appointed to the Michigan Supreme Court in 1956 and wrote 99 opinions while serving. He later resigned to write novels. Writing under the pen name Robert Traver, he penned several books, including Anatomy of a Murder. Filming of "Anatomy of a Murder" began in Marquette County in 1959. The movie was produced and directed by Otto Preminger. Several local citizens were cast as extras and several of the movie's stars stayed at the Mather Inn. The movie received seven Oscar nominations.

Source: [Ishpeming Sesquicentennial](#), 2004.

2.3 Community Events

- **Renaissance Festival**

The annual Renaissance Festival is held the first Saturday in August at Lake Bancroft. The event is generously supported by local sponsors and the City of Ishpeming. The day is filled with unique entertainment provided by quality art booths, authentic period performers, a variety of food and beverage vendors and costumes inspired by historical culture. The event includes arts and crafts booths, theme related merchants, food vendors, a children's activity area (Kid's Castle), and a broad variety of entertainment including dancers, musicians, singers, swordsmen and games from the Renaissance period. Past events have also included a blacksmith on hand for demonstrations all day as well as samurai swordsmen. Different musical groups also perform throughout the day. This annual event attracts a large number of people of all ages and has historically attracted a great number of families. The event has been continuously increasing in popularity, with the last event drawing over 2,000 people.

- **Italian Fest**

The annual Italian Fest is presented by the Italian American Mutual Aid Society of St. Rocco/St. Anthony Society in Ishpeming. The event is held at the Al Quaal Recreation

Area in late July. There is no admission to the event and the public is welcome. Events include: free pony rides, games of chance, ring toss and balloon darts, a dunk tank, the greased pole event, bingo, glide slide and arts and crafts. Different musical groups also perform throughout the day.

- **Gem and Mineral Show**

The 34th annual Gem and Mineral Show will be held at the Ishpeming Elks Club Hall, located at 597 Lakeshore Drive in Ishpeming the first Saturday in August. The show presents displays, dealers, a silent auction, cracker barrel, and a children's area. There is no admission for the Gem and Mineral Show and the public is welcome to the event. There are also field trips conducted around the area to excellent rock finding sites. The event draws people from around the Mid-west.

- **Noquemanon Ski Marathon**

The "MGH Noquemanon Ski Marathon" and "mBank Half Noque" attract cross country skiers from around the nation and around the world. Thousands of skiers have taken the 51K or 25K trek from Ishpeming, the birthplace of organized skiing and home to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame to Marquette's Superior Dome, the world's largest wooden domed stadium along the shores of Lake Superior. Along the way, skiers experience the area's celebrated wilderness. The marathon and half marathon offer separate classic and freestyle races with men's and women's divisions. The first Noquemanon was held in 1999 and attracted 669 skiers. Since that time, thousands of skiers have participated in the marathon and half marathon.

- **Torch Light Trek**

Ishpeming's annual Torch Light Trek youth ski event is typically seen as a kick-off for the entire Noquemanon weekend and serves to introduce a whole new generation to the sport of cross country skiing. The event is held on Main Street in downtown Ishpeming.

- **Ski Jumps at Suicide Hill**

Ski jumping has been held in Ishpeming since 1887, and held at Suicide Hill since 1926. The ski jumps are presented by the Ishpeming Ski Club and have been for 122 years. Suicide Hill is a 90 meter jump with an official hill record of 328 feet and unofficial jumps of around 340 feet as of 2001. Junior Olympics events are also held at Suicide Hill. In past years, the Suicide Hill Ski-Jumping Competition has welcomed skiers from the United States, Finland, Germany, Japan, Austria, France, Norway, Canada, as well as other countries. The jumpers came to the United States as part of the ski-jumping circuit, earning points at each jump which applied towards their standing in the race for the individual cup. Suicide Hill is also the training site for ski jumpers involved in the U.S. Olympic Education Center program at Northern Michigan University in Marquette.

- **Ishpeming Fourth of July Celebration**

The City of Ishpeming has a phenomenal turnout for its Fourth of July activities. The day kicks off with the annual Firecracker five-kilometer race and one-mile walk at the Al Quaal Recreation Area. The Ride for Glory five-kilometer bike race is also held at the recreation area. There is a “Kids Parade” starting at the Mather Inn and proceeding south on Main Street from Canda to Division. The Kids Parade ends with a balloon launch and goody bags for each child who participated by decorating bicycles or marching with their pets. The Ishpeming Fourth of July Parade follows the annual route beginning at Empire and Third Streets and ending at the former Bell Memorial Hospital building on Division Street. After the parade, a community picnic is held at the Al Quaal Recreation Area featuring food booths, activities, bingo, live entertainment and alumni softball games. Fireworks end the celebration, beginning at dusk at the recreation area.

- **Festival of Treasures**

The Festival of Treasures is held in conjunction with Ishpeming’s Fourth of July Celebration. The Festival of Treasures put on by the Ishpeming Business Association is held on Main Street. The festival runs from 10am to 6pm with downtown stores having in-store and sidewalk specials throughout the day. In addition to sales, Ishpeming shuts down Main, Pearl and Cleveland streets to host several different events. Live music runs throughout the festival and demonstrations are held all day. Children’s events are also held.

- **Tilden Mine Tours**

Three hour guided tours depart daily in the summer from the Lake Superior Community Partnership in Marquette. The first stop is at the National Ski Hall of Fame in Ishpeming, where participants receive a brief orientation, watch a video, meet the tour guide and get safety equipment (hard hats and safety glasses). The tour gives participants an overview of the precarious economics of iron mining today. The open pit and plant interior are viewed and the tour ends in the control rooms, where visitors have the chance to ask questions.

- **Buzz the Gut**

Buzz the Gut is the largest classic car show in the immediate area, held in August in Ishpeming. The show is held in the lot adjacent to the Cliffs Mine Shaft. There is a car cruise through Ishpeming and Negaunee held in the evening. A dance follows the cruise.

- **US National Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame and Museum**

As the site of the longest, continually active ski club in the United States, Ishpeming is home to the US National Ski and Snowboard Hall of Fame and Museum. The Hall was

established in Ishpeming in 1954. It is dedicated to the preservation and promotion of America's skiing heritage through the permanent recognition of nationally outstanding skiers, snowboarders and ski sport builders from the United States, through the preservation of and providing public access to the artifacts and archives that make up that heritage and by providing leadership for snow sports in the United States. Visitors can take a tour through the history of skiing by visiting the Hall. There are two floors of exhibits, artifacts, and history. There is also an audiovisual presentation of exhibits showcasing the growth and development of Alpine and Nordic skiing. The museum also includes the Roland Palmedo Ski Library and the Hall Gift Shop. The Hall is open year round and hours vary according to season.

2.4 State and National Historic Sites

Heritage tourism, or tourism oriented toward the cultural legacy of an area, is becoming increasingly popular. The City of Ishpeming is rich in iron ore heritage as well as skiing. Heritage tourism involves visiting historical sites to gain an appreciation of the past. Special historical significance is recognized through listings of the State or National Register of Historic Places. Properties may receive designation from both. Identification and preservation of historical sites can enhance a community's awareness of its past. Area historical sites are listed below.

Birthplace of Skiing in America Informational Designation-National Ski Hall of Fame

- 12/06/1957 Marker erected
- 01/19/1957 State Register listed

The sport of skiing was introduced to America in the nineteenth century by Scandinavian immigrants. The first ski club in Michigan and one of the first in the country was formed at Ishpeming in 1887. It held its first public ski meet on February 25, 1888. Since then this city has produced many famous ski jumpers who have gained their experience on renowned Suicide Hill. The National Ski Association was formed in Ishpeming on February 21, 1904. The National Ski Hall of Fame and Ski Museum is located here because of Ishpeming's historic role in developing skiing in America.

Carnegie Public Library

- 01/18/1980 State Register listed

The Carnegie Public Library was a gift to the city from wealthy philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Designed by Chicago architect John D. Chubb in the Neo-Classical Revival style, the library has served Ishpeming and residents since 1904 as a place of quiet learning and community enrichment.

Cliffs Shaft Mine

- 03/14/1973 State Register listed
- 08/23/1973 Marker erected
- 07/17/1992 National Register listed

Cliffs Shaft Mine was opened by the Iron Cliffs Company in 1879 and was acquired by the present owner, the Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Company, in 1891. The Cliffs Shaft was the nation's largest producer of hard, specular hematite, a type of iron ore. Over twenty-six million tons were mined, and since 1887 ore was shipped every year but one. The mine was also one of the largest of Michigan iron mines, its sixty-five miles of tunnels running under most of Ishpeming and plunging to a depth of 1,358 feet. As late as the 1930s, there were eight iron mines in Ishpeming. The Cliffs Shaft was the last of these, and its closing in 1967 marked the end of an era.

Grace Episcopal Church Complex

- 04/18/1983 State Register listed

The Grace Episcopal Church Complex has historical significance as Ishpeming's oldest Episcopal congregation and recalls its association with Ishpeming mining magnates as their company church, and the Episcopal worship center for Ishpeming mine workers.

Ishpeming Municipal Building

- 01/18/1980 State Register listed
- 07/09/1981 National Register listed

The City Hall has been the home of municipal affairs in Ishpeming since 1891 and is located at the corner of Main and Division Streets, the principal intersection of historic downtown Ishpeming. Constructed at the height of the iron-ore boom in Marquette County, the City Hall has architectural importance for its use of locally quarried Portage Entry sandstone. The hall originally housed the library, jail, and Marshall's office in addition to city offices. The building continues to serve the City of Ishpeming.

Mather Inn

- 06/18/1976 State Register listed
- 12/20/1978 National Register listed

The Mather Inn is a valuable cultural resource primarily because of its associations with nationally renowned landscape architect Warren H. Manning of Massachusetts and Boston architect James H. Ritchie. Construction was initiated and financed mostly by William G. Mather, president of the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company, to replace the Nelson House (the town's finest hotel, destroyed by fire in 1928) and to house important guests of the company. The Mather Inn Preservation Society was created in the mid 1980's, as part of an effort to sustain it. Finally, in 1987, the distressed landmark closed and was sold. The Mather Inn is located at 107 Canada Street. Today, The

Mather Inn is privately owned and undergoing a significant renovation effort. It is projected to open in mid 2009, returning to the Ishpeming community a first class establishment providing a hub of activity on downtown's northern boundary.

2.5 Issues and Opportunities

- The City of Ishpeming is home to many influential and celebrated individuals.
- Throughout the year, Ishpeming holds numerous events celebrating the unique heritage and character of the area. The increasing popularity of these celebrations bring area residents, families and past residents to the City; providing an economic boost to local businesses.
- The City of Ishpeming possesses numerous historical sites, recognized by the State and National historic registers. Grant funding could be pursued to restore and preserve these pieces of cultural history. With the increasing popularity of heritage tourism, promotion of cultural attractions could bring a boost to tourism and to visits from residents.
- **The cost of renovation and restoration of historic buildings often exceeds the property value when completed. Tax breaks and grants are often necessary for construction to occur. Buildings are often left to deteriorate without the essential incentives to renovate.**