

<http://www.pasty.com/reflections/id318.htm>

Many of us that grew up in the Copper Country probably never knew the history behind the canal and how important it was in the early days of mining.

In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, the US Government awarded the **Portage Lake and Lake Superior Ship Canal Company** an initial grant of 200,000 acres of mineral land in return for the construction of a canal through the Keweenaw. This first land grant was used to secure the issuance of fund-raising bonds required to pay for all design, management and construction costs.

The canal was intended to connect Keweenaw Bay (on the East) through Portage Lake into Lake Superior (on the West). This would save lake vessels over a hundred miles of distance as they traveled through the Keweenaw and into other lake regions.

Due to poor financial management and planning, the original company was bankrupted.

The Government eventually granted a total of 450,000 acres of land over the next several years to help support the project, and by 1874 the canal was finally completed by the **Lake Superior Ship Canal, Railway and Iron Company**.

By 1882, the use of the canal was generating \$8,000 in annual income.(fees charged to vessels)

The actual canal was two miles long, 100 feet wide and 14 feet deep. The project also included improvements to the Portage River through the straightening, widening and deepening of its course.

The canal was widened to 500 feet in 1935.