

Houghton County Infirmary and Poor Farm

PORTAGE LAKE MINING GAZETTE

Jan 18, 1872 On Monday last we availed ourself of an opportunity to visit - in company with Mr Orrin W. ROBINSON, the superintendent - the county poor-house.. Nearly one hundred acres of land have been cleared, upon which are grown potatoes, hay, oats, corn, vegetables, in abundance (of the about 200 acres of tolerably good timber and farming land).. The resident overseer of the place, Mr PRIEMER,.. discharges the duties of his position not only to the satisfaction of his employers but also that of his wards.



From the Houghton County Medical Care Facility web page: The history of county-provided long term care services goes back to the 1870's and the Houghton County Infirmary. Michigan Public Act 280, adopted in 1939, provided for the creation of county medical care facilities, directing for the care of aged of the county without regard to their ability to pay.

This historical facility was located west of Houghton and operated at this site until 1968. The county obtained the state TB facility in Hancock built in 1951, renovated to suit long term care and was occupied by the Houghton County Medical care Facility in 1968.

Richard Garnell shares: Houghton had a poor farm up on now Gedvillas Road by Cowles Creek. (Author adds: This is personal/private property, Do Not Trespass, Violators will be prosecuted.) There was no Social Security for older people. So those people that had no family to stay with went to the poor farm. There was a garden and

cows for those people to take care of. Some of the structure remains today.

A Daily Mining Gazette article states: in 1906 the headmaster at the “old poorhouse” was John Schaback. 1904 Polk has him listed as poor house keeper.

The 1910 census listed those living there. See census in another notebook. William Wahl was keeper. Age 44. Cook was Annie Wahl. Age 38. Their children: George 19, Ron 18. Staff included 2 female servants, and 1 hired man. There were 55 male “inmates” the census calls them, and 11 females for a total of 66. Ages ranged from two males being 24 to one female being 86.

An interview with Earl Brinkman December 2008 (51209 Houghton Canal Road, Houghton MI) provided this information: He told of an old foundation and cistern back by the cemetery. He believes this to be the original infirmary. He said that the infirmary got water from a pump house from Cowles Creek water and was pumped up to the farm into cisterns and then to the buildings. He added that an addition was added to the infirmary in the early 50's. He recalled an old brushed in road west of the Sanitarium that went North.

He describes the locations of buildings as such: At the curve in the today named Gedvillas Road was where a large sanitarium was. The building that is there today was where they operated on the residents.

To get to the farm, make the hair pin curve and continue to go up the hill. Then it was a large circle drive. At the top of the hill was the housing structure with the boiler/stack in the back on North side. As one circled, the chicken coop was on the left with 500 chickens. Then came the large barn that held horses first, cattle in mid section in the winter, and manure on the far North end. Behind the barn on the South side was a root cellar. They kept their home-made red vinegar there as well. Behind this cellar was the hay barn on the north and equipment barn on the south end. The hay barn would hold 1500 bales of hay for the cattle.

After Mr. Wahl was Mr. Leonard and Mrs. Edna Christoferson at the helm. Edna took care of the hospital/housing end of the Poor Farm business. Leonard took care of the farm part. There were about 100 people there of which 3 were children when Earl lived there (1937-1953). Dr. Simon LaVigne was the doctor. The Poor Farm property went from the Canal Road back to the Rauhala Road. Beef and dairy cows grazed on rented property of Belconi and Pipparinen nearer to Cowle's Creek.

Earl's mother Alfrieda (born deaf in 1910) came there in 1936 due to her hearing disability. She is the daughter of William and Emma Brinkman of Redridge. Wm. was boss of the Redridge Mill in the 1880's. While there “Frieda” gave birth to Earl in 1937. As Earl grew he helped with the farm chores.

The farm had a pig barn, a chicken coop, about 30 beef cows, and about 30 milking cows. There was a huge garden raising potatoes, carrots, and other typical vegetables for the residents. Extra produce was sold.

As Earl brought home the dairy cows for milking, he picked ripe pears from Belconis and transparent apples from Pipparinen's. (Property now owned by Welsh) He

also picked blackberries along the way. On his trip he would pass by what was called an Indian Cemetery.. just mounds no shelters or raised above ground graves.

Barb Koski learns it is called Potter's Field and a cemetery for the deceased residents. Earl said that no one was buried during his time there so burials must have been from 1870 to ? before 1937. It is on private property of Paine and Dolan. Do not trespass. There are 250 or so people buried in unmarked graves.

Houghton Keweenaw Genealogy Society members Ruth Glecker and Avis West went out to the twp hall in Feb. 2009. Avis shares: we went thru the death records and compiled a list of people buried at the poor farm. We came up with over a 110 names for the cemetery. The records started in 1905 and although the death records went into the 50's it appeared that there were no burials at the farm after the early 20's. There were a lot of people who died at the farm but were buried elsewhere (Liminga, Forest Hill, Lake View, Lake Side, Hancock etc) so we did not list those since they are still active cemeteries and records can be obtained from the sextant. It would be interesting to find out what kind of marker, if any, they used. On one gentlemen's record it noted that he had been in the infirmary for 40 years - that is a really long time.

Earl helped the farm make hay on other family properties. Some families were Dorvinen/Ruohonen's in Oskar, Messners 40 Acres in Bootjack, Matt Manderfield's hay fields in Atlantic Mine, and fields in Chassell. They hauled equipment on trailers to the site. He recalls in Messner's fields they "tied" the bales with wire. Each bale weighed about 100# each.

Earl Brinkman continues to share: The Poor Farm farm was a county venture. It did not have much county budget as the farm produced what residents needed. The farm part got closed down in 1953 because of Government stepping in and declaring the farm had unpasteurized milk, non Grade A beef, eggs were not candled, and Social Security came to be. As Earl was doing mostly farm work he left at age 14 and obtained jobs while living with the Cristoferson's home in Hancock and rental apartments for a few years.

The hospital part kept on. In 1954 all the farm buildings were taken down.. though the hay barn top was gone the bottom was kept to do laundry. Eventually the hospital/housing part of the Poor Farm became a financial burden for the county. Residents were moved to the new County Medical Care Facility along with the residents of the TB Sanitarium that were healed with the "cure".

Alfrieda Brinkman went to foster care homes, later had a stroke and went to the Apostolic Home in Calumet and died there.

Earl Brinkman recalls these folks living on the Onnela Road: Mildred Jampsaa.. she had the best cinnamon rolls ever (though Earl's wife Charlotte's compare worthily), Ormand Lampinen who was a school bus driver and he took local cheese to Green Bay, and was a welder at Michigan Tech.

Farmer's milk went to Bridgeman and Russell Dairy in Hancock and also to

Stella Cheese which was located in Dollar Bay across the street from Partanen's Bar on the concrete slab that remains. And there was another Stella Cheese in Baltic.

He almost drown in Obenhoff Lake. There were peacocks living around there and the local boys would pickup and proudly put in their car visors.

He recalls the best ice cream in Obenhoff.. though can't remember where the store/creamery was.

He went on to work at Michigan Tech in Central stores getting supplies where needed on campus (14 years), Mechanic in wood research building, machinist and heating plant 3 years, and control room of boiler house.

He also served in the Army at Hanover Washington during Korean War. (That is where the A bombs were made.

He told about seeing dyed potatoes in piles in the fields. Some were green. Other piles other colors. They color didn't matter he recalls....They were farmer potatoes the Government paid the farmers NOT to sell the potatoes as the war was over and war production was not needed any longer.

Elias F. Messner of Jackson Michigan writes this story of the Poor House:

It was located on top of a steep hill just off the canal road overlooking the canal. One could see Houghton, Hancock, the canal and even see Lake Superior (due to extensive logging removing the trees that have re-grown now).

It was where the poor ended up when their monetary funds were exhausted and they had nowhere else to go. There was no social security, Medicare, or even pensions in those days. They were given food and shelter and provided with health care of what was available at that time.

The residents were housed in large rooms. Earl describes the following: The second floor on left of attached picture was housing for the women. Men had the top floor and rooms to the right on 2nd floor. As he grew up, away from needing mom, he was a "hired man". He lived in the middle of the 2nd floor with other men working on farm.

Messner continues: Beds were spaced about 8-10 feet apart, a curtain in between, and in that space was housed ones entire worldly possessions. Some had trunks at the foot of their beds that held treasures that they did not want to relinquish, such as some item to remind them of departed spouse, their wedding day, or some handiwork like a doily the crocheted.

The poor house was almost self sufficient and used very few tax payer dollars as those inhabitants who were able shared in some of the labor to run the farm as a business.

Messner continues: On the way up the hill to the poor house was real sharp curve, and that was where the Houghton County tuberculosis sanitarium was located. It was one of the spots in the county that had the freshest cleanest air and that was one ingredient needed to combat TB.

It was a pure white building with a wide veranda on 3 sides and the patients would be wheeled out wrapped in blankets to sit on the veranda and breathe the fresh air.

Dr. Johnson discovered TB in two girls who were in their late teens or early 20's in Redridge; and in those days one was taken to the sanitarium immediately. There was ifs about it, they came after you in a paddy wagon. It was like a jail sentence. Both girls

recovered with the excellent care they received at the Houghton Co. Sanitarium and went on to lead full and normal lives.

Mr. Messner continues his story with reason for going to the poor farm -to have his ma visit friends. He says Mr Walz was manager then in the 1920's. He played with patient of poor farm "Waino" who worked in the animal barn.

Attached are photos of the Houghton County Infirmary "Poor Farm" in the 1900's. Employees are sitting in the grass with chicken coop on the right and Infirmary on the left behind them again in the early 1900's.

Examples of deaths at Poor Farm and Ho. Co. Sanitarium:

Register No. 23; **KOSKI, JOHN**; Born: unknown, about 1872; Place of birth: unknown; Date of death: Apr 25, 1918; Time of death: 6 am.; Age: about 36 yrs.; Cause of death: pulmonary tuberculosis; Attended by signer from: Feb 20, 1918; Attended by signer to: Apr 25, 1918; Alive: Apr 24, 1918; Father: unknown; Birth place of father: unknown; Mother: unknown; Birth place of mother: unknown; Sex: male; Color or race: white; Marital status: unknown; Occupation: laborer; Type of occupation: common laborer; Informant: C. R. Mayer. sanatorium; Hospital: Houghton Co. sanitorium; Related to occupation: Alfred LaBine; Hoton, Mich.; Signed: Apr 20, 1918; Date signed: Houghton; Place of burial: Apr 26, 1918; Date of burial: A. L. Krellwitz; Undertaker: Houghton.

Register No. 22; **ANDREWS, JOHNANA**; Born: May 17, 1889; Place of birth: Hammerfest, Norway; Date of death: Jul 25, 1924; Age: 85 yrs. 2 m. 8 d.; Cause of death: senility; Attended by signer from: Jul 1, 1924; Attended by signer to: Jul 25, 1924; Alive: Jul 20, 1924; Father: unknown; Birth place of father: unknown; Mother: unknown; Birth place of mother: unknown; Sex: female; Color or race: white; Marital status: widowed; Length of stay (in this place): 4 yrs. 2 mos. 4 ds.; Occupation: retired; Informant: Minnie Huddy. Houghton, Mich.; Hospital: Houghton county infirmary; Signed: Alfred LaBine; Hoton, Mich.; Date signed: Jul 26, 1924; Place of burial: Houghton; Date of burial: Jul 26, 1924; Undertaker: A. L. Krellwitz; Address of undertaker: Houghton.

Taken from Houghton GenWeb.

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1883 January 18-PORTAGE LAKE MINING GAZETTE, HOUGHTON, MICHIGAN DIED-

Last Saturday evening, an inmate of the poor farm, John MALONE, committed suicide by hanging himself with a piece of cord.

1888 Feb 9 Thursday-- Frederick MATZELD died at the Houghton County Poor Farm Friday morning. He was 70 years old. He came to the area 26 years ago. Burial was at Forest Hill cemetery, Houghton.

1899 Oct 24 Tuesday-- DEATH Andrew KUISSELNEN of Calumet died at the county poor farm on Monday. He was 83 years old and had been at the farm 2 weeks.

1901 May 8 Wednesday - Frank ERKLIA, aged 48 years, died at the Houghton County Poor Farm yesterday. The funeral will be held today and burial will be at the Farms cemetery.

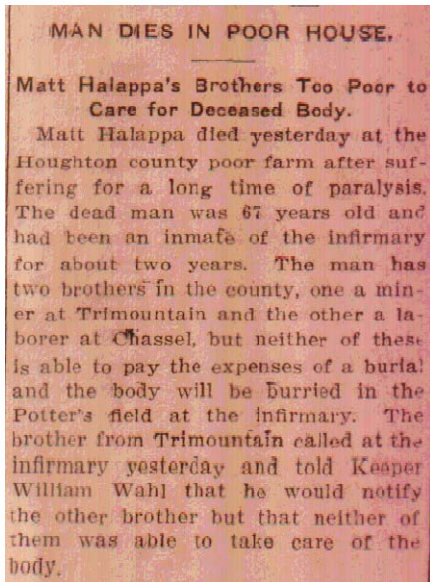
1903 Deaths July 1 Wednesday- Ed COULCK, aged 61 years, was taken sick at his home in Trimountain and was moved to the Houghton County Poor Farm yesterday, where he died two hours later. The funeral will be tomorrow at the poor farm.

1903 September 10 Thursday- DEATHS Mike RIDDLE, aged 60 years old, a farm hand employed on the OBENHOFF farm, near Atlantic, died yesterday morning in the Houghton County Poor House hospital. He was a deaf man and was standing on the track when a rock train hit him, not hearing it approach. He will be buried today at the Potters field at the poor house, as he had no means.

August 30 1905 DIED- Peter BERGLIN, an inmate of the Houghton County Poor Farm died yesterday, aged 60 years. The funeral was held yesterday afternoon at the FARM and he was buried in the Poor Farm cemetery.

October 15, 1905 DIED- John LEHILINEN, aged 62 years, died at the Houghton County Poor Farm, yesterday. Nothing is known of relatives or friends. He was buried yesterday at the Poor Farm cemetery.

1906 January 17 Wednesday- DIED-Word was received in Lake Linden that Isreal GLADDEN had died at the Houghton County Poor Farm where he was taken several weeks ago from suffering with a weak mind. He ran a farm at Boot Jack Point for a number of years. He lived a life of a hermit, coming out of the farm only to sell his crops. He was over 70 years old and no known relatives in the area. He will be buried in the Poor Farm cemetery.



Feb. 2009 Barb Koski heard story: Ken Niemi said his father said that there was a school house at the Poor Farm but it was moved to become the Rauhala School. But another story he said was that Frank Rugani said there was a school at the Smelts at Cowles Creek. We wonder if they could be one and the same building. If anyone reading this has information please share with author.

Researched by Barb Koski Osma Plat Road. Houghton, MI 49931. Submitted in 2009.