

# Houghton County Historical Museum

by Robert L. Fox Jr.

Welcome to Michigan's Copper Country. This is an area rich in history and blessed with spectacular scenery. Copper was the principal mineral to bring fame to the area in the middle and late 1800's as the copper range extended from Copper Harbor to White Pine.

Today, the copper mines are shut down with the exception of the White Pine Mine. Remains of mines, mill sites, ghost towns, etc., can be found throughout the area. This was home to such famous mines as the Calumet & Hecla, Quincy Mining Company, and Cliff Mining Company.

Nestled in the heart of Michigan's famous Keweenaw Peninsula is the Houghton County Historical Society Museum. The museum is located on the site of the famous Calumet & Hecla Mining Company mills, along the shore of Torch Lake. The normal operating season is June through September.

The historical museum was once the main mill office of Calumet & Hecla Mining Company. It contained offices for the mill manager, time-keeping and secretarial staff, surface foreman, chief chemist and metallurgist. Its medical staff consisted of three doctors, a pharmacist, and a nurse.

The building was built in 1917 by local craftsmen under C&H supervision. In 1962, the building was donated to the historical society by Calumet & Hecla Inc. to house a museum. Of the twenty rooms spread over three floors, my favorite room is the mining room. As you enter the room, you will notice the framed mining stock certificates as well as the numerous mining photographs hanging on the walls. Another cabinet protects a scale model of a water-cooled billet mold alongside Douglass Houghton's travel kit. In the center of the room is a fascinating exhibit in miniature of early underground mine models showing the C&H conglomerate, Isle Royal mine, Champion mine and Quincy mine in vivid detail.

Additional items on display include miners' lunch buckets, mine tools, engineers' transits, as well as a scale model of a mine rock (ore) car.

Mining lamps are well represented including candleholders, oilwick lamps, and carbide lamps. There are approximately 35-40 lamps on display including Husson, Baldwin, Justrites, Auto-Lites, Guy's Droppers, and others. Several different carbide containers are on display along with several different styles of miners' caps. There are a variety of photos of mines, mills, and surface workings as well as people who played an important role in copper mining. Don't miss seeing the collection of Copper Mining Company service medals.

A collection of laboratory equipment from the old Freda Mill, the Champion, Quincy, and C&H labs is on display in the Science Room. A Chipmonk crusher is on a shelf with a Whetstone bridge. Other interesting items on display include an early pulp pan-balance, a photo microscope, and a testing mold.

Many old mining books are on display in the Library Room. In addition, many older books relating to Michigan's history as well as the history of the Copper Country are displayed.

Within the walls of the Houghton County Historical Museum are housed thousands of items for you to view and enjoy. Outside, on the grounds of the museum, you will find items such as the "Kibble," a bucket-like mine skip, as well as a C&H smelter "Bull Ladle."

If you are interested in copper mining history and enjoy the opportunity of viewing numerous mining related objects, you should include the Houghton County Historical Museum on your next trip to the Copper County of Michigan.

Reference:

Houghton County Historical Museum brochure